

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

I. Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment.

New legislation, rules and regulations

- Gender mainstreaming in national policy formulation has been recognized by Vietnam Government as a strategic measure to achieve the objective of gender equality of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women by 2010. To realize the Strategy, a National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women for period 2006-2010 (National POA) has been developed with specific objectives, indicators and measures to be taken. Emerging issues such as an imbalance of employment structure, unqualified women workers to meet with market demand, women trafficking, violence against women, etc... have been studied and introduced by indicators and measures to be taken in the National POA.
- The Political Bureau issued Resolution 11 on Female Cadres' Work on the stage of Strengthening Industrialization and Modernization, including Guidelines for Improving the Advancement of Women by 2020.
- The Socio - Economic Development Plan 2006- 2010 (SEDP), a critical National Plan for successfully implementing the last five years of the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2001 – 2010, is the first-ever 5-year Plan that includes gender perspectives. Particularly there is a specific part on gender equality in the Plan. The National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam (NCFAW) has been working closely with the Ministry of Planning and Investment and concerned agencies to make sure that gender is mainstreamed into the implementation process.
- The Law on Gender Equality was approved by the National Assembly in 2006. It was developed according to areas where gender inequality still exists and to provide mechanisms to ensure gender equality. It requires gender mainstreaming into law and policy development as well as into all activities of organizations – agencies related to law and policy - making.

Gender database, research and analysis

- A gender mainstreaming kit, comprising the Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines in National Policy Formulation and Implementation and Gender Mainstreaming Workshop Facilitation Manual in National Policy

Formulation, was developed. These are the first–ever manual on gender mainstreaming in Vietnam. It is not only the tool to make sure that all efforts and interventions are gender sensitive and gender responsive but also provides basic skills in implementing gender mainstreaming for the ministerial and provincial level in the process of policy planning and implementation.

- "Vietnam Gender Statistics in the early years of 21st Century" consisting of data from all provinces and cities in Vietnam was published by NCFAW in cooperation with the General Statistic Office (GSO) for the first time in 2005 and widely distributed. The most impressive feature of the book is that the data was collected and analyzed on the basis of indicators on the rights of Vietnamese women in the spirit of CEDAW. In each area, the report mentions a number of key gender issues, identified trends and makes a conclusion. This is an important and easily accessible source of information on gender equality for sociologists, researchers, policy makers and decision makers. The book is also a basis for the Government and local authorities to review and integrate effectively gender issues in policy and planning.
- In general, gender-sex-disaggregated indicators have been put in national surveys conducted by the GSO. Books on these surveys have been published and disseminated from central to local levels including Statistical Data on Labor and Employment in Vietnam and Result of the Survey of Households Living Standards...
- NCFAW worked closely with 4 key leadership training institutes (Ho Chi Minh Political Academy, National Academy for Politics and Administration, Youth Academy and Women Cadre School) to develop gender sensitive curriculum and apply in teaching programs starting from 2005 in those institutions.
- In the framework of project VIE 01/015/01 "Gender in public policy" of NCFAW, United Nations Development Program and Royal Netherlands Embassy, a research on emerging gender issues in Vietnam during economic integration and an empirical research "Gender in factory: a study of emerging gender issues in the garment and footwear industries in Vietnam". It is expected that the fact findings will be useful for economic and trade policy formulation to ensure gender equality promotion through the developments of economic integration.

II. Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action and the

further initiatives and actions identifies in the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

1. IN GENERAL

Viet Nam successfully presented the 5th and 6th National Periodic Report on the implementation of CEDAW at the 37th Session of the CEDAW Committee in January 2007. The UN highly values Vietnam's achievements especially the efforts to improve laws and policies related to women.

“Vietnam is among the leading nations of the world in terms of the ratio of women's participation in economic activities and is one of the more advanced countries with respect to gender equality, Vietnam stands out for its success in closing the gender gap in the last 20 years in the East Asia countries”, Vietnam Country Gender Assessment (December 2006) prepared by World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), UK Department for International Development (DFID) and Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

Over the last few decades, Vietnam has made impressive progress in economic and social development. Adult literacy rates for men and women are 96% and 91% respectively. Vietnam has also exceeded the target of 30% of postgraduate qualifications belonging to women. Female labors participate increasingly into non-agricultural sectors, particularly economic sectors and fields with high technical demands as well as informal economic fields and services: 46% is working in manufacture and business; over 49.4% is participating in household business; 34% is participating into science and technology activities. This shows the labor market premium for education. The Vietnam Development Report, 2006, shows an increase of 70% in the gap between an employed person holding a university degree compared to someone with only primary education. Life expectancy has increased by more than six years for both men and women, at the age of 69 and 73 respectively. The percentage of Vietnamese women in the National Assembly is 25.76%, ranking 1st in ASEAN and 28th in the world. 85% of men and 83% of women between the age of 15 and 60 participated in the labor force in 2006. The above figures helped Viet Nam rank 105th out of 177 countries in UNDP's Human Development Index (UNDP, 2008), placing it in the group of countries with medium human development. Efforts to close the gender gap and to invest in human resources have resulted in Vietnam ranking 109th out of 177 countries on the Gender Development Index (GDI). Vietnam stands out for its success in closing gender disparity.

Vietnam has almost reached sex-balance in education at all levels, over 90% of women have access to healthcare services, maternal mortality rates at birth have been reduced from 85/100 000 live births in 2004 to 75/100 000 in 2007. The changes in credit policies and poverty reduction and hunger eradication programs help women obtain more credit funds. In 2006, the Vietnamese Government agreed to the opening of credits funds for women by the Vietnam Women's Union, and allocated an initial budget of 40 billion VND to the VWU.

2. Economic advancement for women

New legislation, rules and regulations

- Decree No 113/2004/ND-CP dated 16 April 2004 issued by the Government regulates administrative punishment for violations of the Labor Law relating to women laborers. This Decree aims to ensure good working conditions and economic benefits of women laborers, as well as sets up legal basis for them to protect themselves in labor transactions.

- On 9 March 2005, the Government issued the Decree No 28/2005/ND-CP on the organization and operation of micro finance institutions in Vietnam. This Decree sets up an important legal basis for socio-political organizations, social organizations, benevolent funds, social funds and Vietnam NGOs to provide micro credit services for families of low incomes. Accordingly, this mechanism creates favorable conditions for poor women to access to micro credits so as to develop business and trading, which would contribute to higher income and poverty eradication.

- With regard to breast-feeding leave, according to the regulations, female workers can take 60 minutes off every day for 12 months to breast -feed the baby and still get paid. This policy has allowed female workers to arrange breast -feeding time suitable with their personal conditions and their work, which create good conditions for female labors to work more effectively.

- Through the suggestions and comments from concerned agencies including Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), Vietnam Women's Union (VWU), Ministry of Trade, etc Vietnam has been developing and adjusting laws and policies in order to enhance women's economic status in general and female entrepreneurs in particular. These suggestions and comments were acknowledged and presented in the Vietnam's roadmap for socio-economic development - the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy, which has been viewed by various national and international experts as the most gender responsive strategy to date in Viet Nam. Two key

measures in this strategy for development are to strengthen the participation of women in socio-economic fields and to mainstream gender perspectives into policy planning and implementation.

Implementation and achievements

- As the recent statistic, the number of female frequently takes part in social and economic activities are on the rise, accounts for 49.3%, of which 48.78% in urban area and 49.46% in rural area. In term of distribution in economic sectors, women accounts for 48.2% and had a high share in such sectors such as processing with 48.72%, fishery with 49.78%, trade with 63.75%, hotel and restaurant with 68%. Accordingly, the high ratio of women working in service and trade is along the right shift in the economic structure toward sectors that contribute significantly to the fast growth of GDP.

- Since 2001, the *Women Entrepreneurs Council* was set up under the VCCI with the function of representing women entrepreneurs for the support and protection of their interests in international and domestic relations, as well as, promoting and assisting women entrepreneurs in trade and investment, technological applications in Vietnam and abroad.

- VCCI in cooperation with Vietnam Women's Union holds the annual ceremony in order to give Awards for Excellent Female Entrepreneurs.

- One Vice-chairperson of VCCI is a woman.

- In 2004, the Small and Medium Enterprise Promotion Bureau, under the Ministry of Planning – Investment was established.

- Every year, the Prime Minister has a meeting with enterprise representatives to discuss obstacles and difficulties in their activities.

- By 2005, 84 Clubs with 2,816 members and 8 Associations for female entrepreneurs have been established, which help create an important basis to broaden more the Female Entrepreneurs Network and to provide opportunities for information exchange, business extension and participating in policy making.

- Every year, women owned enterprises have many opportunities to access new information on markets and technologies through trade promotion activities jointly carried out by the VCCI, Ministries of Trade, Ministry of Culture and Information. These include the Vietnamese Women's Economic Development

and Integration Fair, Asia-Pacific Female Entrepreneurs Fair and Exhibition, American-Vietnamese Female Entrepreneurs Conference. They are also provided with opportunities to participate in an annual competition held across the country: Product Design Creation Competition – GOLDEN-V Prize.

- In the recent years, the Government of Vietnam has carried out many measures to develop the household economic sectors, especially in the rural areas. Model of small credit loans from job creation, poverty reduction and farm economy programs have provided women with both jobs and higher income. Annually, there are many kinds of loan for women members to develop their own business. These loans encourage women in the form of household and enterprise assisting, focus on job creating, producing high valued goods and products, implementing economic mechanism shifting and creating more jobs that suit to level of local labors.

- The amended Land Law (2004) and the Family - Marriage Law regulate that the names of both wife and husband are to be put in land and property certificates. This enables women to use their land or property in order to secure loans for economic expansion. The pilot project "Changing/providing land use certificates (LUC) with names of both wife and husband in Vietnam" was carried out in 20 selected poor communes of 20 different provinces in the country by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. After the completion of the project, the number of LUC with names of both wife and husband makes of 91.23% of the total LUCs. This outcome contributes to the increase of social equity in the land administration and provides women with more chance to access bank loans.

- The campaign “women do good business” has been soundly performing in many provinces under the goal: supplying capital, exchanging knowledge in doing business and managing enterprise, meeting with excellent groups and individuals, etc.

Obstacles and challenges

- Trade policies are not gender-sensitive. Male laborers and women laborers are considered a general labor resource although the policies have different impacts on women and men.

- It is still difficult for rural and mountainous women to effectively get access favorable policies of social security, labor sanitation condition, manufacturing facilities and loans due to lack of knowledge. In addition, old customs and habits prevent them from participating in social and economic activities.

- Women labors in the informal sectors do not fully enjoy policies stipulated in the labor policies.
- The female labor force constitutes the majority of workers in export-oriented sectors such as garment, agriculture production, processing of food – drink – seafood etc, which are very strongly affected by economic integration.

Lesson learnt

- It is necessary to empower women to ensure they equally share in the benefits of globalization rather than in many cases shouldering the negative consequences.
- Economic empowerment for women can be achieved if we implement comprehensive measures including: communication to enhance women's own awareness and also the entire society on women's status in the integration process; knowledge and skill intensification for women through training; implementing gender-oriented policies and laws; and promoting the strength of the women's movement and organizations.

3. Women and political participation

New legislation, rules and regulations

- The Regulations on Democracy in Communes and Offices was issued to create favorable conditions for women to equally participate in decision-making on local-economic development issues and employee's rights.
- Resolution No 42-NQ/TW dated 30th November 2004 on leadership and management planning in accelerating industrialization and modernization of the country was issued. One of the important objectives of the Resolution is increasing women in leadership and management.
- The Government, relevant agencies and local administrations have carried out many measures to promote and train civil servants, particularly female civil servants, in order to narrow the gaps in leadership participation between men and women. Some ministries/agencies and provinces have issued regulations providing subsidies to women participating in training courses that are 30% higher than the subsidies provided to men.

Implementation and achievements

- The national review of 10-year implementation of the Directive No 37-CT/TW on the work on female cadres in the new situation showed the fact that there is greater awareness on the work on female cadres of leaders and the civil cadres at different levels. Also, the capacity of female cadres has improved, reflected by their educational background, expertise, politics understanding, management capacity and competency. The review also mapped out the general objective to be reached by the year 2010 which is sustainable development of female leaders and managers in all fields and at all levels, ensuring an improvement in quality and quantity of female cadres to meet the requirements of the country's modernization and industrialization and to attain gender equality in leadership and management bodies. For this, 4 targets and 6 key measures have been set and developed.
- After a range of activities organized by NCFAW and concerned organizations towards the 2004- 2009 People's Council Election, the outstanding result is shown through the two following aspects: (1) public awareness on women's role, position and ability in social life is increased; (2) women proportion in People's Councils across the country at provincial, district and commune level is 23.8%, 23.2% and 20.1% respectively; an average increase of 2.7% in comparison with previous period.

Challenges and obstacles:

- The rate of women leaders in public administration, judicial agencies, research and science institutions are still low. That is not in line with women's capacity and contribution to socio-economic development
- The backward thinking of male preference is still popular in some parts of the population
- Women are not confident and self-motivated. Their strength and activities are often rooted only in women's organizations and movements.
- The retirement age between men and women is different.

Lessons learnt:

- It is necessary to develop policies to promote women's participation in non-traditional areas and break the "glass ceiling" that restrains the participation of women in leadership and state management.
- Improve the operation of monitoring and evaluating agencies to ensure that women's rights are seriously implemented.

III. Institutional development

- The national machinery for the advancement of women in Viet Nam has been strengthened in 2008 and now includes the National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs.
- The NCFAW is a coordinately interdisciplinary organization, which has a function to assist the Prime Minister in researching and coordinating to deal with interdisciplinary issues related to the advancement of women in the whole country. NCFAW plays an important role in the development and implementation of laws and policies related to the implementation of women's rights through a series of activities: monitoring and advising the formulation of interdisciplinary programs and policies for the advancement of women in Viet Nam.
- State management agencies of gender equality are the MOLISA at the central level and Departments of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs in localities. The responsibilities of State management agencies of gender equality are specified in the Article 26 of the Gender Equality Law and relevant Decrees.

The Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs takes responsibility before the Government for exercising State management of gender equality throughout the country. The State management agencies of gender equality plays an important role in developing strategies, policies and national targets on gender equality and submitting them to the Government for promulgation; developing guidelines for legal documents on gender equality and also submitting those to the Government for promulgation; taking part in assessing gender mainstreaming in the drafting of legal documents; reporting to the Government about the realization of national targets on gender equality; co-ordinating with ministries and ministry equivalents in State management of gender equality; supervising and inspecting the implementation of laws on gender equality, settling complaints and handling violations of the laws..

- Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI)– Promoting Gender-Responsive National Policy and Planning. As the central government agency responsible for national planning and investment, MPI has a critical role to play in ensuring that all government organizations fulfill their own functions and responsibility in a gender-responsive manner, so that all policies and programs take account of men's and women's priorities and interests, that gender inequalities are identified and addressed, and that the benefits of national programs are distributed equitably between all members of society.

The Ministry of Planning and Investment in collaboration with The National Committee for the Advancement of Women and related ministries, branches and other bodies, and the People's Committees of provinces and centrally managed cities, are responsible for coordinating the implementation of the POA3. Gender issues are expected to be integrated into the five year and annual socio-economic development plans of ministries, branches and localities. The agencies listed in the POA3 will develop their own plans, and are responsible for planning and implementing assigned activities that are relevant to their organization's State management areas and professional activities in fulfilling the POA3 targets.

Role of civil society

- The VWU and NCFAW are active in organizing meetings with female members of parliament to brief them on emerging issues related so that they can advocate women issues in regular National Assembly Sessions.
- After the Beijing plus 10, NCFAW collaborated with VWU to conduct conferences, workshops to disseminate information on the Conference.

IV. Remaining challenges and actions to address them

One challenge Vietnam faces in implementation is the backward practice of male preference. Both men and women perpetuate this. By virtue of their position, some women themselves are timid and resigned to their role in society. Such thinking and values are contributing to entrenched gender inequalities such as women's lower status in the home, son-preference and the failure of men to fully share household and family responsibilities, especially in rural areas. This of course limits women's opportunities and chances for advancement.

Another challenge is that the gender mainstreaming approach is still poorly understood. Planning and policy officers remain of the view that gender issues are separate to their core work and are the responsibility of NCFAW or the VWU.

The challenges of male preference and lack of understanding of gender mainstreaming makes information, education and communication campaigns extremely important. This is the task not only for NCFAW and VWU but also for all central ministries/ agencies and local authorities. Increased efforts are needed to communicate the link between gender equality and sustainable development.

Despite concerted efforts, gender mainstreaming is not being carried out well. Part of the reason for this is that at present there is no effective mechanism to assess gender responsibilities of central and local level agencies and decision-makers. Also, officials trained in gender mainstreaming may retire or change jobs, particularly at the local level. Therefore training is a continuous process but financial resources are limited.

To achieve the goal, Vietnam determines to implement comprehensive measures including: communication to enhance women's own awareness and also the entire society on women's status in the integration process; knowledge and skill intensification for women through training; implementing gender-oriented policies and laws; and promoting the strength of the women's movement and organizations.