PART 1: Overview of achievements and challenges in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam has a population of around 79.5 million people. Women account for 50.9% of the population and 50.6% of the labor force. Around 25.7% of the population live in urban areas, with 74.3% in rural areas. The population growth rate has fallen significantly over the last decade to 1.4% as a result of Vietnam's successful population policy, which received a UN award in 1999.

Over the last 10 years, Vietnam has recorded many impressive achievements in its strive toward gender equality. These achievements have occurred in a poor country that has made equitable socio-economic development a priority. It is the result of the Government's commitment to the advancement of women and gender equality.

Policy on gender equality and empowerment of women

The principles of equality and non-discrimination are enshrined in the Vietnamese Constitution, protected by its legal system and implemented through concrete policies and plans of action. For the first time, at the Beijing Conference in 1995, Vietnam Government launched the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam by the Year 2000 with 10 objectives. This reflected the commitment of the Vietnamese Government before the international community for gender equality and women's advancement. To aid the implementation, a National Plan of Action for the Advancement of women by the year 2000 (called POA 1) was approved with 11 objectives. The POA 1 provided concerned ministries, central agencies and local authorities with different responsibilities to ensure the full and equal participation of women into all aspects of socio-economic life. Progress towards the goal of gender equality under POA 1 was assessed in 2001.

On the basis of lessons learnt in the implementation of the first National Strategy and POA 1, the Government adopted a second National Strategy for the Advancement of Women by the Year 2010 (National Strategy) in early 2002. Its overall objective is to improve the quality of women's material and spiritual life, as well as establishing the conditions necessary for women to experience their fundamental rights, and to fully and equally participate in and benefit from all aspects of political, economic, cultural and social life. The Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women by the Year 2005 (POA2) was also developed to guide implementation of the National Strategy in the first five years. The National Strategy and POA2 contain fewer and more focussed objectives in the areas of employment, education, health care, women's

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1 Survey on population changes and family planning, 1/4/2002
participation in leadership and strengthening the machinery for the advancement of women. The POA2 provides 20 concrete indicators and 66 specific actions to be taken. These indicators and actions are being implemented by respective ministries - central agencies and local authorities and they must report their progress to the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI) and the National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam (NCFAW) annually. Further, NCFAW members who are vice ministers or equivalent from concerned ministries are also responsible for specific objectives. These measures form an accountability framework for the implementation of the National Strategy and POA2.

In addition, to ensure that the National Strategy is integrated and implemented in all sector areas, Committees for the Advancement of Women (CFAWs) at 45 out of 45 central ministries-agencies and 61 out of 61 cities/provinces developed their own plans of action and implementation measures based on their actual situation.

Monitoring missions to review the implementation of laws, and policies related to women, including POA are carried out every year by NCFAW with the involvement of concern ministries/agencies and interested partners. If an organization is found not to have fulfilled its responsibilities they are asked to explain and requested to carry out their tasks. In some cases, they are required to take action as directed by the Prime Minister. The outcomes of monitoring missions are reported to the Prime Minister, including specific recommendations on the promotion of POA implementation every year. During the past 10 years, NCFAW has sent 2-3 monitoring missions to each ministry-agency and city-province.

The National Strategy and POA are considered an instrument for the promotion of gender equality and women's advancement in Vietnam. However, in some cases the results have not met the objectives due to reasons such as: the thinking of "male preference" which still exists in some parts of the society; the authorities at all levels do not prioritize the National Strategy and POA; and the operation of the machinery for advancement of women is limited by lack of financial and human resources. In addition, the Gender-based mainstreaming approach is also quite new therefore Vietnam lacks capacity to integrate it effectively into policy and planning. To draw lessons learnt and ensure better implementation of the POA, it is planed to conduct mid-term review on the POA implementation in the middle of 2004.

Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Declaration Goals

In September 2000, H.E. President of the State Tran Duc Luong attend the UN Millennium Summit and on be half of Vietnam signed the Millennium Declaration, strongly reaffirming its commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. The MDGs have been localized into the Vietnam Development Goals (VDG). In many cases, the VDGs go further than the MDGs and incorporate more targets in relation to gender equality. To transform these targets into reality, the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) was developed and approved by the Prime Minister in May 2002. The CPRGS incorporates gender targets, the VDGs, and draws together existing national strategies (including the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women) and sector plans into a concrete road map for development. The NCFAW and Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) were invited as consultants in the process of drafting the CPRGS. As the result, gender issues have
been considered and integrated into every objective of the CPRGS. Its implementation is currently being supervised by VWU - as a member of the Central Management Board with a gender perspective. The skillful incorporation of gender concerns in Vietnam’s CPRGS is considered a model for other poverty reduction strategies in the region.

CEDAW

Vietnam has always attached great importance to the observance of international treaties to which Vietnam is a party including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Vietnam was one of the first countries to ratify the CEDAW. In 2001, the 2nd and combined 3rd and 4th CEDAW reports were presented to the CEDAW Committee successfully. Right after Vietnam received the concluding comments of the CEDAW Committee, they were translated and sent to concerned agencies for consideration. This will ensures timely incorporation of CEDAW Committee concerns in Vietnam's legislative programme. Vietnam is one of a few countries to have completed a 5th and 6th CEDAW report. The report is planned to submit to the United Nations later this year. During the preparation of the National Reports, there is the involvement of related ministries, central agencies and women organizations. This is considered an effective process for not only raising awareness on CEDAW but also enhancing the obligation of implementation of branches and agencies at all levels.

Main legislative and policy making achievements

Over the past decade, Vietnam has conducted many legal reforms, and revisions and issued policies in which gender equality and women's empowerment are concerned and promoted. These include, for example, ensuring further women's equal rights in civic and economic matters, and marriage and family; women's benefit of regulations on social welfare, nationality issues; ensuring an appropriate rate of women in elected bodies and women's names are registered on the land use certificates. Details of those achievements can be found in Part 2.

Budget

The government has increasingly been paying more attention to gender perspectives in public expenditure. The Ministry of Finance has conducted surveys and made report on public expenditure in Vietnam. One part of the report is devoted to gender assessments. As a result of this process, the budget allocation has increased in social welfare fields including education, health care, hunger elimination, poverty reduction and building capacity for human resources. In addition, as a branch member of NCFAW as assigned by the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Finance allocates an annually appropriate budget for activities for the advancement of women. Based on this, ministries -agencies and cities - provinces and the finance departments are guided on how to plan, budget and spend funds on activities for gender and the advancement of women.

Government policy discussion and parliamentary debates

In the National Assembly Sessions, when law drafts and national development issues have been discussed, women and gender issues have been one of the key agenda items. Besides, women
comprise 27.31% of the National Assembly and represent the concerns and aspirations of women in national policy debates. Recently, the National Assembly has carefully discussed matters related to women's retirement age, increasing women's participation in elected bodies, and preventing social evils including prostitution. In particular, after consideration of and consultation on a proposal made by the VWU, the National Assembly has decided to draft a Law on Gender Equality. The VWU and NCFAW will play a leading role in drafting this law in collaboration with concerned ministries/agencies. Stakeholders are currently debating the content of this law.

Furthermore, the Prime Minister has issued a document regulating that gender and women issues would be included in the regular cabinet meetings, and that the Prime Minister will work with NCFAW and VWU periodically to update information and give direction on actions to be taken to recommendations on gender equality and women's advancement.

**Armed conflict**

Nearly 30 years later, Vietnam has made great efforts to deal with the consequences of war, taking into account gender concerns. For example, the Government awarded the title "Hero Vietnamese Mother" for about 40,000 whose husbands and children died for the country. Favorable policies have also issued for the war victims, disabled and sick veterans (including women) and dioxin victims (including children).

**Globalization and technology**

Globalization and increased trade are likely to significantly affect the livelihoods of people in general and women in particular. While globalization creates many opportunities for women (jobs, incomes, skills, new science and technology), there are also some downsides. For example, low-skilled women workers in the agricultural and industrial sectors (particularly textiles, clothing and footwear) are more vulnerable to market risk and potential exploitation, including long work hours and unsafe working conditions.

While ICT is one of the most useful means of trading, the use of advanced ICT by women, particularly rural women, is quite low. This affects women's access to the regional and global markets.

In addition, the number of working women who attend vocational training has increased, professional skills of working women are still low in comparison with men. According to the survey of Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs and International Labour Organization (ILO) 2001, working women account for ¾ of the low-skill jobs.

**Sector areas**

Vietnam has a unique system of CFAWs in central ministries - agencies and cities - provinces to ensure that national policy has local relevance. As mentioned above, all central ministries - agencies and cities - provinces in Vietnam have developed their POAs by 2000 and 2005. The POA 2 has been implementing more effectively in comparison with the POA by 2000. Some
sectors have initiatives to integrate gender into their professional work namely Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Committee for population, Family and Children Affairs. In 2001, for example, Ministry of Justice issued Directive No. 02/2001/CT-BTP on strengthening activities for advancement of women in its vertical line. The Directive proposed 8 main tasks, of which the overall task is to mainstream gender into formulation and dissemination of law and other professional activities in order to implement the overall objective for advancement of Vietnamese women. The Minister appointed CFAW in cooperation with relevant units to guide, monitor, review and then report the implementation results of the Directive to Ministry’s leaders. From that, leaders could issue more suitable and effective policies or regulations related to women.

Recently, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development published the Plan of Action for administration reform by 2005 (Plan). This is an active response to the demands of the Overall Plan of Action for administration reform aimed at creating favorable conditions for the development of the whole branch. The Plan was developed in a reformative way, including the application of a systematic step-by-step approach, attracting the participation of most staff. In particular, gender issues in strengthening human resources have been integrated into the Plan. This reflects the Ministry’s commitment to ensuring gender balance in the process of administration reform. In 2003, the Ministry also approved the Gender Strategy in Agriculture and Rural Development with specific objectives in order to ensure gender equality and advancement for women in agricultural branch and rural women.

**Partnerships**

Partnerships with mass organizations play an important role in the struggle for gender equality and empowerment of women in Vietnam. These mass organizations include the VWU, Trade Union, Vietnam Peasant's Union and Youth Union - whose leaders are NCFAW members. They carry out many information - education and communication activities on gender equality and building families into units that are “plentiful, equal, progressive and happy”. In particular, the VWU, a very strong force with nearly 12 million members, represents the will and aspiration of Vietnamese women. Together with government agencies and social-political organizations, the VWU has cultivated Vietnamese women who are patriotic, knowledgeable, healthy, dynamic, innovative, well-cultured, kind-hearted and attentive to social and community interests. In addition, local women's NGOs and civil society groups are involved in providing comments and conducting surveys in support of gender equality and empowerment of women.

**Engagement of men and boys**

Men are engaged at all levels with respect to policy making on gender equality. The focal point for gender policy, the NCFAW has 13 male members out of 18 (vice-ministerial level or equivalent). Most CFAWs are headed by a male vice-minister/equivalent at the ministerial level or a vice-president of People's Committees in charge of cultural and social issues at the provincial level. Men are the target of many information education campaigns such as “If you share housework with women, happiness will be doubled”. Textbooks for boys and girls at primary and secondary level have been revised to reflect equality between the sexes, and criticize discriminatory behavior towards women. However, the participation of men and boys in the field
of gender equality has been limited, especially in awareness, family matters and prevention of social evils.
PART 2: Progress in implementation of the critical areas of concerns of the Beijing Platform of Action and the further initiatives and actions identified in the twenty third special session of the General Assembly

A. WOMEN AND POVERTY

Legislation, policies and programs

- During past 10 years, hunger elimination and poverty reduction is one of the national target programmes. The number of poor households drastically reduced to 11% according to the National Standard. Vietnam established the Bank for the poor people, renamed the Social Policy Bank. The Social Policy Bank has increased the loans permitted from 3 million Vietnamese dong to 7 million Vietnamese dong and the loan period from 36 months to 60 months. In 2002, the number of poor female headed households provided with loans accounted for 60% of total loans provided.
- In 2003, the government allocated around $US 60 million for the Hunger Elimination and Poverty Reduction and Job Creation Program and nearly $US 95 million for the Program 135 on division of the rural development program for the communal level, of which poor women were one of the target groups.
- See National Strategy Objective 1, Indicator 4.
- The revised Land Law (2003) and Marriage and Family Law (2000) makes it clear that both names of the wife and husband should be on the land use certificate. This regulation creates favorable conditions for women to participate in financial transactions including borrowing loans for economic development.
- Decree 78/2002ND-CP was issued with the aim of extending the target for providing loans to poor women.
- According to Decree 178/1999/ND-CP on insurance for borrowed loans of credit organizations, poor women can be provided with a small loan by the credit organization through the security of local social-political organizations such as the VWU.
- The VWU coordinates many programs and funds for women providing both access to credit and training in financial management. For example the "Saving Day for Poor Women" scheme and TYM Credit Fund following the model of Gramee Bank.
- According to the VWU, in 2002, 2.61 million women were accessed for loans throughout the country; the number of poor women accessed for loans was 1.47 million including over 20% of poor female headed households. From 2000, VWU set up and approved 613 projects, creating 27,119 new jobs with a total turnover of 44 billion Vietnamese dong to develop small-scale industry, cattle raising and acquaculture. This money also helps to restore traditional careers like weaving, embroidery and knitting, assisting thousands of families to rise out of poverty.
- To date 45 out of 61 provinces have Vocational Training Centers belonging to the VWU.
- In 2000 the Agriculture and Rural Development Bank and the VWU signed a joint resolution on providing loans to women. To the year 2003, 57 out of 90 branches provided loans for 1.3 million women with total amount of 5,134 billion Vietnamese dong. This has become a model because of the low default rate in providing loans to women.
• The volunteer social insurance system, implemented as a pilot in some provinces, will ensure the rights of women in rural and remote areas and people who fall outside the target group for the social insurance law.
• As a result of the government's commitment to poverty reduction:
  - The rate of poor households reduced from 37% in 1998 to 29% in 2002 and 11% in 2003. The rate of female headed poor households reduced from 28% in 1998 to 20% in 2002 and the male poor headed household reduced from 40% in 1998 to 31% in 2002 (according to household living standards survey 2003).
  - 70% of women enjoy access to public services such as electricity, roads, post office, health centers and schools.

Obstacles and challenges

• Vietnam is still a developing country and the level of economic development is limited.
• Weather conditions in Vietnam are difficult: floods, droughts and epidemics frequently occur.
• The rate of poor female headed households is still 20%. Their knowledge as well as capital-management skills are limited; and ability to set up efficient business proposals is limited.

Lesson learnt

• A comprehensive and systematic gender sensitive framework for hunger elimination and poverty reduction is essential for gender inclusive social development.
• Capacity building for communal administration in the field of hunger elimination and poverty reduction is critical.
• Communication and training is important to improve women's skills and knowledge, especially for rural women.

B. EDUCATION AND TRAINING OF WOMEN

Legislation, policies, programs and achievements

• Article 59 of the 1992 Constitution states "The citizen has the right to education and job training in many forms" and "Primary education is compulsory and free".
• The principle of equality between men and women in education is institutionalized in law, policies and programs such as: Law on Education in 1998, the Strategy on socio-economic development in the period 2001-2010; the Strategy on educational development in the period 2001-2010; the National Plan of Action on Education for All (the EFA Plan) in the period 2003-2015.
• As a result of the above policies and programs, Vietnam has made remarkable achievements. The net primary enrolment rate is 91% for girls and 91,7% for boys. The enrolment ratio of girls to boys (ER) 2001-2002 is almost proportionate: ER for girls in primary school is 47,58%; secondary school 47,08%; high school: 47,4%. The ER for females in College is 48,8% and 43,8% in university. To April 2003, there are 15 provinces to finalize compulsory secondary education.
In 2000, Vietnam implemented a nation-wide illiteracy program. Every year, 60,000-100,000 people attend classes to learn post literacy skills in which the rate of women and girl children account for 38-40% and the rate of women with literacy skills aged 15-35 years old is 95% and for men 96% reflecting a narrowing in the difference between the rate of literacy for women and men to 1,044 percentage points.

The system of vocational schooling is set up from the central level to the local level in both public and private school system with a total of 227 schools in 2001. The number of people trained in vocational schools increased from 447,000 people in 1997 to 792,000 people in 2000, in which females accounted for 40%. The proportion of women attending examinations at vocational centers was 40% in 2001-2002. The proportion of women attending examinations in scientific fields at university and college increased to 52.6% reflecting an active change in the career choices of women.

The rate of female staff in education branch is 70% in which there is 1 vice-minister and 7 directors of ministerial departments and 11 directors of provincial departments.

There has been an active focus on education in ethnic areas with teaching 8 ethnic languages at local levels.

Many funds are being set in order to encourage women to enhance their education and capacity such as Kovalepskaia Award and the Vietnam Women's Award.

Textbooks of classes 1, 2, 6, 7 were revised to remove gender bias - for example, illustrations are used to reflect equality between the sexes, and texts include critiques of discriminatory behavior towards women. To the year 2000 gender issues have been included in the content of teaching program at Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy and political schools in some provinces. Dissemination of information on gender issues for leaders has been strengthened.

The budget for education in the total national budget increased to 15.6% in 2002 (equivalent to 20,623 billion dong).

Obstacles and challenges

There are disparities in the enrollment ratios between urban and regional and ethnic areas due to economic circumstances and traditional norms on the role of women in the home. The drop out rate of girl children remains high.

The higher the level of education, the lower the rate of women in comparison with men.

Lessons learnt

Enhancing the awareness for teachers, educational policy makers, and editors of textbooks will have a direct impact at the policy level to narrow present gender disparities in education.

Conducting research on enrollment of girls will provide a sound basis for assessing educational demand and analyzing disparities between policies and practices.
C. WOMEN AND HEALTH

Legislation, policies, programs and achievements

• Ensuring women's access to information and quality health care and family planning services is affirmed in laws and policies such as: the Law on Protection of People's Health; the Strategy on Healthcare and Protection of People's Health in the period 2001-2010; the National Strategy on Reproductive Healthcare in the period 2001-2010; the National Strategy on Population and Ordinance on Population.

• In recent years, Vietnam has seen significant improvements in the health of women and children. The child mortality rate (less than 5 years old) decreased from 81% in 1999 to 42% in 2000. The maternal mortality rate decreased from 200% to 95%. The average number of pre-natal consultations per pregnancy increased from 2,359,610 times in 1994 to 4,195,141 times in 2001. The rate of undernourished children decreased from 40% in 1997 to 30.1% in 2002. The rate of married couples using contraceptive methods increased from 60.0% in 2000 to 75% in 2003.

• The Government has issued Decision 139/2002QD-TTg on medical services for poor people. 14,649,000 persons (females accounting for 41%) have benefited from around 50,000-70,000 Vietnamese dong per person per year through health insurance cards or subsidized medical services.

• According to the Ordinance on older people, aged persons benefit from priority services such as examinations in health care centers and those aged 90 or above are provided with a free health care card as regulated by Decree 120/2003/CP.

• Thanks to Decree 73/1999/ND-CP in 1999 on encouraging socialization in the field of education, health, culture and sport, mass organizations such as Fatherland Front, Vietnam Women's Union, Youth Union, Trade Union and Peasant's Union have implemented many programs and projects on reproductive health, family planning and prevention of HIV/AIDS. These topics are also part of the school curriculum and explored in discussion groups such as youth unit meetings.

• As regulated, every year all health care centers at commune and ward levels have implemented regular check ups for mothers and their newborn children and provide vitamins for children and iron supplements for pregnant women, 15 year old female adolescents and new mothers.

• The Government has been implementing the strategic plan in preventing HIV/AIDS in the period 2001-2005, which concentrates on strengthening care and support for people living with HIV/AIDS and preventing transmission from mothers to children. The number of recorded cases of HIV/AIDS in Vietnam is 73,660 with women accounting for 13.98%.

• The website www.tamsubantre.org on reproductive health and sexual health, HIV/AIDS for adolescents made by Consultation and Investment in Health Promotion (CIHP) provides counseling and information and is a forum for these issues to be discussed.

• To the year 2002, there are 13,051 health centers: 100% of provinces and districts and 98% of communes have health centers.

• 100% of communes and towns have health staff in which the number of communes with doctors increased from 33.86% in 1999 to 60.60% in 2003 and those with a mid-wife, pediatric or obstetric assistant increased from 79.9% in 1997 to 90% in 2003.
The Ministry of Health approved the Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to 2005 with a target of 30-35% women in leadership at all levels. At present women account for: 62% of all staff in the Ministry of Health; one minister; 14.4% of leaders of departments and institutes under the ministry level; and 16.7% of leaders at the provincial level.

In 2001, the health budget accounted for 5% of the total national budget, an increase of about 21% compared to 2000.

Obstacles and challenges

- In practice the quality of health services is not high. Some women in mountainous areas and ethnic minority groups have not favorable conditions to access health services yet.
- Men play the main role in choosing contraceptive methods and as a result, the rate of IUD among married couples is 56.5%, the pill 10.5%, condom use 8.4% and male sterilization 0.5%. Women have little ability to negotiate safe sex and when contraceptives are used women are burdened with the possible side effects.

Lessons learnt

- It will improve women's and children's health if women are trained to take care of themselves and their family members and to maintain hygienic conditions and food safety.
- Information, communication and education campaigns on reproductive health, family planning and HIV/AIDS are carried out through many channels to reach a wide audience. However, more effort is needed to strengthen male awareness of these issues. Greater male responsibility in these areas will lead to an improvement in women's health.

D. VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Legislation, policies, programs and achievements

- Vietnam's 1992 Constitution states clearly that "the citizen shall enjoy inviolable rights and the protection of the law with regard to his/her life, health, honor and dignity... All forms of coercion, corporal punishment and violation of the citizen's honor and dignity are strictly forbidden".
- In 2000 the Prime Minister decided to establish a National Committee for the Prevention of Aids, Drugs and Prostitution. Based on this, all central agencies and provinces have formed executive committees with annual plans and budgets for operation. VWU is a member of the National Committee and Local Executive Committees.
- For the first time, on 17 March 2003, the Standing Committee of the National Assembly issued Ordinance 10/2003/PL-UBTVQH11 on preventing and fighting against prostitution. This is a specific legal document with the greatest power in the field of preventing and fighting against prostitution.
- Although domestic violence and rape in marriage are not stipulated as separate offences in Vietnam, the 1999 Penal Code contains provisions that apply to domestic violence and regard such acts as violations of victims' human rights. Such provisions include "Ill treating or persecuting grand-parents, parents, spouses, children, grandchildren and/or fosterers" (Article 151) and "Forcible marriage or prevention of voluntary and progressive marriage" (Article 146).
• The VWU is very active in campaigning to end violence against women:
  - In 2001, the VWU launched a handbook "A Guide to Assist Trafficked Women and Children". This handbook is also being used for activities to prevent and fight against other social evils.
  - In 2002 the VWU organized a workshop "For a life without violence against women". The purpose of the workshop was to discuss measures to prevent and eliminate gender-based violence.

• In 1998, courts nation-wide tried 556 rape cases with 617 accused. In 2001, 1,037 rape cases were tried with 1,133 accused. The courts have also tried cases related to sexual harassment of women.

• Hotlines and advisory services have been set up to deal with violence against women.

• In 2002, the Ministry of Justice organized a workshop on international law on preventing trafficking of women and children. This was a chance for the legislative officials to assess the effectiveness of legal documents and how they are applied in practice and to propose more effective laws and regulations.

Obstacles and challenges

• Advisory service centers, conciliation teams, hotlines and domestic violence shelters (only in Ho Chi Minh City) have been established but are insufficient to meet the demand.

• Women usually endure in silence and do not want to make accusations of violence, therefore the violence continues to occur and agencies are unable to intervene in a timely manner.

• Information, Education, Communication activities on law and policies in general and gender-based violence in particular have not been implemented widely at all levels to all strata of society - especially in rural and far and remote areas.

• Trafficking in women has become a cross-border problem that cannot be solved by one country alone.

Lessons learnt

• The main reason for violence or trafficking of women for prostitution is economic difficulties. Therefore, it is necessary to have effective measures to reduce poverty and encourage economic growth.

• Strengthening regional and international cooperation in solving trafficking in women will result in more effective outcomes.

E. WOMEN AND ARMED CONFLICT

Since Vietnam gained Independence in 1975, the Government has made many efforts to deal with the consequences of the war. For example, the Government issued policy to serve the "Vietnamese Hero Mothers". The movement "Grateful to deserving People" has been promoted throughout the country. Some favorable policies for volunteer youth (of which around 60% are women) in war periods have been issued. Single women caused by the war have also been
provided land or houses, and may have children without facing discrimination. Families who are victims of the chemical dioxin used during the war receive subsidies each month from the State budget and international aid.

F. WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

Legislation, policies, programs and achievements

- The Labor Code and other legal documents on labor contain favorable policies for working women and organizations that hire women such as: equal pay; women are able to continue their job after maternity leave; and enterprises that hire many working women pay reduced income tax.
- Women enjoy a preferential retirement scheme, introduced more than 50 years ago. The legal age for retirement is 55 for women and 60 for men. This allows women more time for resting in recognition of their hard work. Women who have only been working 25 years and retire at age 55 are entitled to the same retirement salary as men who work 30 years and retire at age 60. The government has also issued Decree No 71/2000/ND-CP which provides for an extension of 1-5 years for the retirement age of civil servants on a voluntary basis. In a recent survey, it was found that 70% of the population are in favor of the early retirement policy.
- The law allows women to participate in organizations that protect the rights of the laborer in general and working women in particular such as trade unions, women's units, women's unions, farmers' unions and youth unions.
- See National Strategy Objective 1.
- The Law on Enterprise 2002 contains favorable regulations for the development of Vietnamese enterprises without discriminating between male or female run enterprises.
- The Plan of Action of the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs contains concrete targets to ensure women's rights in labor and employment and assigns implementing responsibility to each concerned department and institution.
- Resolution of the 9th National Women's Congress 2002 set a target "Support women to develop family economy, implement economic transition in the farm economy and small and medium enterprise development, creating more jobs for women." One of the six main programs of the VWU is supporting women in economic development.
- According to the survey statistics on labor in 2002, working women over 15 participating in regular economic activity account for 49.3% of workers, an increase of 2.49 percentage points in 2001, in urban areas, 48.78% and in rural areas 49.46%. Women account for 48.2% of workers in the economic sector with highest proportions in: processing 48.72%, aquaculture 49.78%, trade 63.75% and hotel and restaurants 68%.
- According to the General Statistics Office, in 2001, 24.7% of enterprises were owned by women, and the majority is in private sector: 47% of enterprises owned by women are in the field of hotels and restaurants, 34% in trade, 28% in garments, 29% in private and public services, 23.6% producing food and drinks.
- To 2002, there were 80,000 enterprises registered including 20% enterprises run by women and 2.2 million business households including 30% households run by women (Statistics of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry)
Migrant working women account for about 34% of migrant workers mostly in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the two biggest Vietnamese cities. Vietnamese law provides migrant workers with the same rights as other workers living and working in the cities.

Many conferences have been organized by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Company for Advertisement and Exhibition (Ministry of Trade) and VWU to promote women in business.

The VWU conducts research and runs programs to support women in the economic sector. The national fund for creating jobs managed by the VWU since 2000 has increased to 13 billion Vietnamese dong increasing the total amount loaned to 39.5 billion Vietnamese dong for the small and micro-enterprises owned by women and for investment to produce high quality products and creating jobs in local areas for thousands of working women. In addition, the central women cadre school - under VWU - has a subject "development of women's small enterprises" in their training module.

To the year 2002, there were more than 84 clubs and 6 associations established for women entrepreneurs.

From 2001 to 2003 the Ho Chi Minh Central Youth Union assessed and provided loans for 257 national projects on supporting and creating jobs with the total budget of 14,268 million Vietnamese dong and generating income for 4,143 young people of which 40% are female.

Obstacles and challenges

- The income of working women is still lower than that of men.
- In general, the qualifications, foreign language ability, knowledge and business management skills, ability to access information and technology are lower for women compared to men. Some women are not confident and daring in their business pursuits and women bear responsibility for housework, which limits their time for entrepreneurial activities.
- Working women are concentrated in some fields like agriculture, education, health care and services.

Lessons Learnt

- Knowledge and skills for women especially women in rural and mountainous areas are important conditions for women to improve their capacity to participate in economic activity.
- Men sharing the family responsibilities with women will help women have more chance to access economic opportunities.

G. WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION-MAKING

Legislation, policies, programs and achievements

- The Constitution of Vietnam affirms that women have equal rights with men in decision-making.
- The Law on Election of Deputies to the National Assembly 2002 (Article 10) provides the number of female National Assembly deputies shall be proposed by the National Assembly Standing Committee at the suggestion of the Presidium of Vietnam Women's Union Central Committee thus ensuring that the number of female deputies is appropriate.
• The Law on the Election of Deputies to the People's Councils 2003 provides that the standing bodies of the provincial and district level People's Councils shall propose the proportion, composition and number of deputies to be elected from political, socio-political and economic organizations, people's armed force units and state agencies of the same level and administrative units of lower levels, ensuring the appropriate number of female deputies to the People's Councils.

• See National Strategy, Objective 4, Indicator 3.

• Decision 49/QD-TTg dated 8 January 2004 issued by the Prime Minister regulates that the average number of women deputies in the People's Council should be 25%, and 27% for big cities.

• In 2002, the Government directed a review of the implementation of the Decision 163/HDBT on the regulation of responsibility of local authorities at all levels in ensuring the participation of VWU at all levels in State management. As a result, Decree 19/2003/ND-CP was issued to replace Decision 163/HDBT. This is a positive change made by the Government to create more favorable conditions for VWU at all levels to participate in the State management.

• In 2003, under the direction of the Central Party Committee all central agencies and local authorities have been reviewing the implementation of Directive 37-CT/TW on women cadres. This is a very important exercise for all branches at all levels to assess their achievements, obstacles and propose concrete measures in order to strengthen planning, training and use of women cadres.

• The proportion of women in the National Assembly has continuously increased during recent legislatures. Women accounted for 18.5%, 26.22% and 27.31% in the Legislature 9 (1992-1997), Legislature 10 (1997-2002) and Legislature 11 (2002-2007) respectively. In addition, to increase the number of women members in the National Assembly 11th legislature, NCFAW organized training courses for 216 women candidates. As a result, 136 out of 498 women were elected. Vietnam remains the first ranked country in Asia for women in national parliament.

• For the 1999-2004 People's Council Elections, NCFAW and the VWU organized a training course on leadership skills for 18,000 women candidates. A nation-wide media campaign was also launched to mobilize people to vote for women. As a result, the percentage of women in People's Councils at all levels increased in comparison with the 1994-1999 term: 22.5% at the provincial level (2.15 percentage point increase); 20.7% at the district level (up 2.6 percentage points); 16.34% at the commune level (up 1.94 percentage points)

• For the 2004-2009 People's Council Elections held in April 2004, the NCFAW and concerned government ministries organized a media campaign, training of women candidates, and a national conference on gender and the People's Council Election laws.

• During the past 10 years, Vietnam has always had one woman Vice-President of the State.

**Obstacles and challenges**

• At the moment, the number of women in legislative agencies is on the increase. But the rate of women in executive agencies is low. For example, women account for only 11.9% ministers (or equivalent) and 8.1% vice-ministers (or equivalent). At the local level, women account for 6.4%, 4.9% and 4.5% at the provincial, district and commune levels respectively.
• Line-agencies have failed to develop their plans consistently and strategically by incorporating gender perspectives with respect to training, selecting and promoting women.
• Women in leadership positions are usually limited to roles in social fields. There are few women in leadership positions in economic management, planning and scientific fields.

Lessons learnt

• In order to increase the number of women in leadership, it is necessary to measures of policy advocacy, capacity building for women themselves and information, education and communication campaigns.

H. HUMAN RIGHTS OF WOMEN

Legislation, policies, programs and achievements

• The principle of equality and non-discrimination between men and women in Vietnam was set forth in the 1946 Constitution and re-affirmed in the 1992 Constitution.
• The principles and provisions under CEDAW have been studied and translated into concrete legal norms in many of the recently adopted Vietnamese legal documents including the Penal Code, Labor code, Marriage and Family Law and Land Law. Women have rights such as during their 4 months maternity leave, they are entitled to a state subsidy in addition to their normal wage. Unmarried women can access birth technologies like in-vitro-fertilization, according to the advice of the medical practitioner; and the recruitment age for both men and women to work in government jobs is the same at 18-40 years of age (in the past women were recruited from ages 18-35).
• From 2000-2003 Vietnam issued 52 laws, ordinances and other legal documents with consideration of the gender perspective. These include the Law on Election of Deputies to the National Assembly elections, Law on Election of Deputies to the People's Council, Labor Code, Ordinance on Population and Ordinance on Prevention of Prostitution.
• The Decree on Grassroots Democracy (1998) stipulates that every citizen, man and woman have the right be informed of and participate in the activities carried out by local authorities and state agencies.
• Drafting a law on gender equality has been approved by the 11th National Assembly under the resolution on Law Development Program 2004. It is planned that a law on gender equality will be issued in 2007.
• Free legal services for poor people and women are becoming more and more available throughout Vietnam.
• NCFAW has published and widely distributed many materials such as information kit on gender equality, reference books relating to Beijing +5, guidebooks on women's integration into APEC and a handbook on rights and duties of women.
• The program on law dissemination and education 2003-2007 states clearly that women are one of the target groups for education.
• The implementation of law and policy related to women has been monitored regularly by NCFAW and VWU at all levels. The recommendations of women at grassroots level have been collected and sent to the government and concerned ministries-agencies.
Obstacles and challenges

- There is gender bias in the awareness of some people.
- The women themselves, especially in rural areas are not fully aware about their rights and entitlements.

Lessons Learnt

- Local VWUs play an important role in protecting women's rights, especially in rural and mountainous areas.
- Information, education and communication activities on gender equality for people and women are important measures.

I. WOMEN AND THE MEDIA

Legislation, policies, programs and achievements

- In 1997, the media campaign on gender equality was launched in mass media throughout the country. A media kit was published. All media management organizations and media organizations committed to disseminate information on gender equality and women's advancement.
- NCFAW has a strong focus on information, education and communication activities including:
  - Managing a Resource Center on Gender and Development;
  - Publishing the newsletter, "Women and Progress". This newsletter is distributed widely within the NCFAW system from the central to the grassroots, and English copies are distributed to international organizations in Vietnam and overseas organizations and individuals.
  - Publishing many useful documents such as "Statistics on Women and Men in Vietnam" which was published in both Vietnamese and English in 2002. This brochure provides sex-disaggregated data according to various themes such as education and economic participation; and
  - Maintaining a website in both Vietnamese and English. In 2001 and 2002, 4,000 turns of people visited this website.
- The VWU also carries out many communication activities. It publishes a newspaper and magazine, both called "Vietnamese Women" and runs the Women's Publishing House. Each local VWU in the 61 provinces also issue their own newsletter.
- Vietnam Television and the radio station "Voice of Vietnam" have their own programs on women such as "Women and Life" - a 15 minute program broadcast on Vietnam Television eight times a month. Many women role models, women's organizations and other agencies that have achieved good results in policies for women are shown on these types of programmes.
- In 2002, the Ministry of Culture and Information organized a roundtable discussion on "Women of Ministry of Culture and Information with participation in management positions in the Doi Moi Period". Women account for 41.7% of total employees in this branch compared to 51.3% on average in State management. The purpose of the roundtable
discussion was to provide opportunities for women in management activities to share with their leaders their advantages, disadvantages and expectations.

- Since 2000, Vietnam Women’s Museum has held many picture exhibitions on women, including: Vietnamese Women in Doi Moi 1987-2002; Progress and Development, 70 Years Development of Vietnam Women’s Union; 70 years development of Vietnam Women's Union; and Five Years of Vietnamese Women in ASEAN.

**Obstacles and challenges**

- The ratio of urban women accessing mass media is much higher than rural women. For example, while 38.3% of urban women access three forms of media, only 15.5% of rural women do the same. Further, the rate of women accessing the internet is quite low.
- The rate of women in leadership in branches of Culture and Information is rather low.
- There have been some advertisements that are gender-biased and distort the image of women.

**Lessons learnt**

- To enhance the participation and access of women to media, it is necessary to have good cooperation among NCFAW, VWU and the mass media.

**J. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Legislation, policies, programs and achievements**

- In April 2000, the National Rural Clean Water Supply and Sanitation Strategy up to Year of 2020 was approved by the Government, with the target of 100% rural population using clean water, accessing proper toilet facilities and preserving the environment at the communal level.
- In December 2003, the Government approved the National Strategy for Environmental Protection 2010, which strives to ensure that 100% of the urban population and 95% of the rural population use clean water and hygienic systems.
- At present, the National Plan of Action for Environmental Protection in the period 2001-2005 is being implemented at all central and local levels.
- The Ministry of Education and Training has implemented the project on strengthening the work of environmental education.
- As a member of the National Steering Committee on Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS), the VWU has conducted many programs and activities related to environment. Their objectives are to enhance the awareness of all strata of women:
  - 400 VWU’s key staffs have been trained on planning activities to protect environment and foster state management skills related to this work.
  - 49,000 VWU's motivators have been trained on communications skills for environmental activities at grassroots level.
  - A large number of VWU units participate in the Saturday clean up day of the lane, alley or street in which they live.
In 1997, the National Report on gender and development of water resources was done by the Mekong River Committee, which had a strategic proposal to strengthen women’s role in developing natural resources at lower sections of the Mekong River.

In 1998, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development organized a workshop on women and firewood.

In 2003, 60% of the urban population and 54% rural population access clean water, increasing about 12% compared with 2001.

The budget for environment accounts for about 2% of the total annual national budget.

**Obstacles and challenges**

- Women are not yet fully aware that environment is one factor to ensure sustainable development. Coordination between functional agencies and the women's unions at all levels in implementing programmes, activities on environment is not effective.
- Vietnam faces many pressures on the environment such as a high population with 79.5 million people; population density of with 235 people/km$^2$ and rapid development of urban areas.
- There is no detailed research on the impact of environmental policies related to women and the integration of gender into environmental protection is weak.

**Lessons learnt**

- Research on the interaction between women and environment in Vietnam is necessary to develop a suitable proposal to strengthen women’s role in policies, programmes of environment and sustainable development.

**K. THE GIRL CHILD**

**Legislation, policies, programs and achievements**

- Decree 32/CP/2003 on marriage and family prohibits parents discriminating between their children. The Decree on Population 2003 stipulates that: choosing the sex of an unborn child by any means is prohibited; the wife and husband have equal rights in the decision on when to have children, the number of children and the space (number of years) between children.
- The rate of children with birth certificates increased from 60% in 1991-1996 to 87% in early 2002.
- The government prohibits publishing material that is harmful to children (Law on Publishing)
- Vietnam continues to implement "a month of action for children", including the following content: ending discrimination between girls and boys and high quality, basic education for all children.
- Extension of the boarding school system for ethnic minorities creates favorable conditions for ethnic minority children, including girl children. There are policies and measures in place to assist orphans and children in poor families, ethnic minority groups, mountainous areas and seaside regions. Many funds have been set up for this purpose (Fund for Young Talents, Fund for Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction, Fund for Children).
• Through the project "Increase income and literacy for women and girl children" organized by the Vietnam Women's Union, 225 literacy classes were attended by 73,800 girl children and 54 after-literacy classes were attended by 56,088 girl children.
• About 65% children attend kindergartens, including 69% girl children and 59% boy children.
• Women's Unions at all levels have set up many funds to put an end to child malnutrition. The rate of malnourished children under 5 years old has declined to 22.5% (National health survey 2002).
• VWU has held many workshops on preventing family violence including violence towards the girl child.
• Among the 200,000 prostitutes in Vietnam, 7-10.5% is girls under the age of 16 (according to estimates of the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs). The proportion of children sold, stolen or traded has declined from 4.78% in 1999 to 1.85% in 2000.
• Children can express their point of view through the activities of the young pioneers association, the youth union and media specifically for young people. Once a year, in April, a day for children is held with radio and television. Clubs for small reporters have been established in many provinces and cities at the "Voice of Vietnam" stations.
• In 1995, child representatives were invited to the 3rd Regional Ministerial Consultative Meeting on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the 4th South East - Pacific Regional Ministerial Consultative Meeting on Objectives and Development by 2000.

Obstacles and challenges

• Information Communication and Education activities on children's rights have not reached some rural and mountainous areas. There has been the thinking "children have to obey their parents" in many families in these areas.
• Some difficult problems remain:
  - a number of children do not have birth certificates;
  - some under-age children are working as housemaids;
  - some children are trafficked and forced to be prostitutes; and
  - the school drop out rate for girls is higher than boys.

Lessons Learnt

• It is necessary to improve awareness of all levels and branches and all people on the rights of the girl child.
PART 3: Institutional Development

a) National machinery:

The National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam (NCFAW) was established in 1993 following a restructuring of the National Committee for the Women’s Decade (founded in 1985).

The NCFAW is a sector-wide committee made up of leaders from ministries, central agencies and mass organizations. Enhanced in 2001, the NCFAW currently consists of 18 members. The Prime Minister invites the President of the Vietnam Women’s Union to be the Chairperson of NCFAW. The two Vice-Chairpersons are Vice-Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Education-Training.

**NCFAW’s mandates:**

- Advise the Prime Minister on the formulation of laws and policies related to gender equality and women’s advancement.
- Collaborate with relevant agencies to promote and monitor the implementation of laws and policies related to women at ministries, branches and provinces.
- Collaborate with concerned agencies to disseminate and advocate implementation of laws and policies related to women and CEDAW; take a leading role in preparing periodic national reports on the implementation of CEDAW in Vietnam.
- Be a focal point in the international cooperation on gender equality and women’s advancement.

The main partner of NCFAW in activities for the advancement of women in Vietnam is VWU. The VWU was established in 1930 as a socio-political organization, representing will and expectation of all women in Vietnam. VWU has a 4-level system to all communes and wards in the whole country with close to 12 million members. By implementing different programmes, VWU has been bringing the tradition of Vietnamese women into full play and contributing to the national defense, construction and development of Vietnam.

The relationship between NCFAW and VWU is close and direct. The will and expectation of women is reflected in recommendations of NCFAW to the Prime Minister. The women’s unions at the different levels (provincial, district and commune) also play a very important role in implementation of the National Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women.

Annually NCFAW is allocated a budget to operate from the State Budget. The NCFAW budget has averaged 650,000,000 Vietnamese dong a year (approximately $41,700 USD) over the last 10 years. In last 3 years, the NCFAW budget has being increasing to reach a level of 800,000,000 Vietnamese dong in 2003 (approximately $51,300 USD). During the past 10 years, NCFAW has actively and flexibly mobilized 3.7 million USD from international organizations.
b) Focal points:

In order to facilitate NCFAW’s operation, in 1994, the Government issued a Directive on the establishment of Committees for the Advancement of Women (CFAWs) at central ministries/agencies and provinces/cities across the whole country. The task of the CFAWs is to give advice to integrate gender into different areas and socio-economic development policies of line ministries/agencies and provinces/cities.

At present, 45 ministries/agencies and 61/64 provinces have established their own CFAWs. Three provinces were newly designated in late 2003 and so have not yet had time to establish CFAWs but they will be asked to do so in the coming months. At the ministerial level, CFAWs have also been established within their subordinate departments, units and research centers. At the local level, the CFAWs have been established through districts and some communes and wards. The Ministries of National Defense, Public Security and Ha Tay and Soc Trang provinces have developed machinery for the advancement of women in 100% of their own subordinate units.

Resources for activities of CFAWs come from within the ministries and provinces. Specifically, the Head of the CFAW is a vice-minister/ equivalent at the ministerial level or a vice-president of People’s Committees in charge of cultural and social issues at the provincial level. The key CFAW members are representatives of financial, planning, personnel departments/units and women’s unions. Depending on the internal structure of the ministries and provinces, the number of CFAW members is different; it might be 8-15 members normally (smaller than the NCFAW structure).

Annually, ministries/agencies and cities/provinces are responsible for allocating a regular budget for their activities for the advancement of women based on the proposals of CFAWs. 81% of ministries/agencies and 96% of cities/provinces have allocated a budget for these activities with an average of 30 million Vietnamese dong a year (approximately $1,920 USD). In accordance with NCFAW’s recommendation some provinces have allocated 1% of their annual regular budget for these activities. The Ministry of Justice, the People’ Supreme Court, Ha Nam, Hoa Binh and Hung Yen provinces have also issued instructions on enhancing activities for the advancement of women and considered it as a category of their officer award schemes.

c) Monitoring:

Annually, NCFAW monitors the implementation of the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women and laws and policies related to women. From its foundation, NCFAW has conducted 179 monitoring missions to ministries/agencies and cities/provinces. The monitoring missions include an NCFAW member (Head of mission), representatives of the Government Office, VWU, Central People Mobilization Department and CFAWs. All the monitoring reports are synthesized, reviewed and submitted to the Prime Minister complete with recommendations.
Annually, ministries/agencies and cities/provinces are responsible for filing reports on the implementation of strategies/plans of action as well as activities relating to women’s advancement once every 6 months. Furthermore, since 2003, the Government has decided to include an assessment of women’s advancement in the annual report on its management. This has created a new structure of accountability for the promotion of gender equality across line ministries.

Based on periodical reports of ministries/agencies and cities/provinces and monitoring reports, NCFAW submits its review to the Government once every 6 months. Based on NCFAW recommendations, the Prime Minister sends letters to concerned agencies requesting that they implement measures to address the priorities outlined. Then, NCFAW plays a role of supervisor and controller to ministries to address gender issues. All of the important ministries working on gender issues and women’s advancement are NCFAW members, so NCFAW and those ministries have a good opportunity to discuss and obtain agreement easily.

d) Capacity building:

To build capacity for stakeholders to act forward the gender equality and women’s advancement, NCFAW pays much attention on training. NCFAW established a group of resource gender trainers and conducted training on gender awareness and gender mainstreaming for National Assembly candidates, People Council candidates, CFAW leaders and permanent staff. Further, NCFAW initiated the establishment of a Network of gender consultants within central ministries/agencies with the aim of improving consultancy skills on gender in the policy-making process and to develop cooperation among ministries/agencies on this matter. Thanks to these efforts, the capacity for promoting gender mainstreaming has been significantly enhanced and achieved concrete outcomes. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has set up an objective to have at least 30% of female participants in its agricultural, forestry and irrigation extension trainings. The General Statistics Office has been integrating gender into their professional activities via many meaningful publications such as “Population and Housing Census”, “Men and women in 90th decade” and the Population and development database (in which “Population and Gender” is a particular chapter). Especially, gender was mentioned directly and in-detail in the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (Vietnam’s blueprint for equitable development) and the National Plan of Action for People’s Education 2003-2015.

In addition, NCFAW provides guidelines on the operation of CFAWs; supervises and monitors the implementation of the National Strategy and POA; and distributes and disseminates publications on gender, new policies and good practices related to women’s advancement. Those activities are considered a measure to improve the capacity of CFAWs.

e) Indicators:

In the 1990's a system of gender statistics with 114 indicators in the fields of population, family and households, employment, economy, culture and education, health, social ills and leadership. However, its application has been considered difficult and not correspondive.
Therefore, the General Statistics Office (GSO) has now officially published a set of 58 indicators on women's rights. Based on this the National Strategy, CEDAW implementation and law and policies related to women can be monitored.

In general, the CFAW of the GSO disseminates information widely to all staff and employees from central to local levels. Therefore, the statistical branch is considered a vanguard in gender mainstreaming in its professional activities. The statistical branch now has step-by-step integrated gender in its own activities with the development of a set of data on rights of women and girls and database of population and development. The General Statistical Office has been endeavoring to better meet the need of disaggregated statistics of different levels and branches for equality between men and women. The requirement of gender mainstreaming and sex-dissaggregated data has been considered in the population census, household living standards survey and other surveys.

Challenges remain in relation to gender statistics mostly stemming from problems in collecting statistics in general: the statistical system in Vietnam is not synchronized and systematic; and there is a lack of technical equipment, human resources and funding. Therefore, it is not possible at present to disaggregate data through whole statistical system.

There are many socio-economic areas lacking disaggregated data, such as: labour and employment, culture, social benefit, environment and information and communication. At present, only the areas of population, leadership, education, healthcare and credit have relatively sufficient data to make an important contribution to gender sensitive decision making in Vietnam.

f) Roles of different stakeholders:

There are several parliamentary and governmental agencies working and supporting the cause of gender equality in Vietnam, including the National Assembly Committee on Social Affairs, National Committee on Population - Family and Children Affairs and Committee on Prevention of HIV/AIDS. They are responsible for integrating gender into legislation, policy-making and the implementation process all over the country.

Socio-political organizations such as the VWU, Peasant's Union, Trade Union, Youth Union and NGOs play a role of disseminator, advocator and monitor to ensure the gender equality in reality. 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 these women issues in regular National Assembly Sessions.

In particular, international organizations in Vietnam and NCFAW had the initiative to establish the Gender Action Partnership (GAP - a group of key government, NGOs and international organizations) in order to promote efforts to enhance gender equality in Vietnam through programmes and projects. As the result, in 2003, NCFAW collaborated with the GAP to carry out a gender analysis of the CPRGS.
In order to strengthen the role of stakeholders, including NGOs, in practice, NCFAW has conducted workshops and training on gender awareness and gender mainstreaming for the leaders and staff of these agencies and organizations. At the same time, NCFAW have been cooperating closely with them in research, involve them in activities for the advancement of women based on their tasks and priorities. For example, after the Beijing Conference and Beijing +5, NCFAW cooperated with NGOs to conduct conferences, workshops to disseminate information on the Conference. NCFAW in collaboration with the Center for Education, Promotion and Empowerment for Women and the Centre for Gender, Environment and Sustainable Development Studies conducted a survey to analyze the gender situation in the areas of labor and employment, education, health care and leadership. Besides, research and training institutes, including the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, Women's Cadre School, and National Administration Academy have also supported gender sensitive policy planning via their operation. Through such concrete actions, NGOs have had a good opportunity to participate directly in the policy-making process in Vietnam according to the spirit of the Beijing Platform.
PART 4: Main challenges and actions to address them

Vietnam is proud of its many accomplishments in the field of women's advancement as outlined in this report. These achievements have occurred in the context of a developing country with limited financial resources and human capital skilled in gender issues. However, the Government of Vietnam recognizes that there is still further work to be done.

Vietnam is firmly committed to the Beijing and Beijing +5 objectives and has set out its priorities in the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women by 2010. This year, the Government will conduct a review of the document relating to implementation of the National Strategy - the Plan of Action to 2005. This review will be an opportunity to assess progress made and identify steps to accelerate realization of the goals for women's advancement. It will be also a foundation to develop a Plan of Action to 2010.

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.

Since 2002, NCFAW has conducted 18 training courses for permanent staff and leaders of CFAWs on gender mainstreaming skills. NCFAW has also build up a network of 500 gender mainstreaming trainers from CFAWs, Research Institutes and gender consultants.

However, 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.

Going forward, NCFAW is considering collaborating with the Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy, National Administration Academy and other schools, institutes to include a subject on gender mainstreaming for training of leaders. This will ensure that all future leaders at all levels (central, provincial etc) receive gender mainstreaming training. For the first time, NCFAW has also developed "Gender Mainstreaming Guidelines in National Policy
Formulation and Implementation. These guidelines will be widely distributed to all CFAWs and Institutes and international agencies working in Vietnam. In addition, a facilitation manual will be distributed so that organizations can conduct their own training on how to use the guidelines.

Another initiative to mainstream gender into government policy and planning is to include gender indicators in the National Social and Economic Development Plan and the annual report provided by the Ministry of Planning and Investment to the Prime Minister. As this is a new and difficult task, NCFAW will work closely with the CFAW of the Ministry of Planning to develop an appropriate framework.

A further challenge is the negative impact of globalization on the life, income and jobs of women, and on trafficking in women for prostitution. All of these areas require further research and consideration. The NCFAW has recently commissioned research into gender issues associated with economic integration in Vietnam. The research will focus on issues faced by women and men in the garment and footwear industries as a basis for determining whether women are being unfairly used as a source of comparative advantage.

Vietnam is also pleased to report that the National Assembly has approved drafting a law on gender equality by 2007. At present there are two frameworks under consideration: 1) the law contains specific provisions to promote gender equality in various fields 2) the law is only a mechanism to strengthen the execution of existing regulations. This new and exciting project is at a very early stage. Over the next few years, the VWU and concerned ministries/agencies will be consulting widely with national and international experts to develop the law.

Through these measures and continued commitment to the Beijing and Beijing +5 objectives, CEDAW, Vietnam is confident it will see real improvements in the material and spiritual life of women and men in Vietnam. The specific objectives have been identified in the National Strategy, including priority fields such as: 1) hunger elimination and poverty reduction, job creation and increased income for women; 2) training and education; 3) health care; 4) strengthen the participation of women in the field of politics, economics, culture, society and in leadership positions; and 5) strengthen the capacity of the national machinery for the advancement of women. Vietnam is trying its best to achieve 20 specific indicators of the above priority objectives.
## GLOSSARY

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NCFAW</td>
<td>National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam. Inter-ministerial (or equivalent) body responsible for setting national policy and direction in relation to equality for women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFAWs</td>
<td>Committees for the Advancement of Women – regional units with responsibility for policy and direction in relation to equality for women. CFAWs are established in each central ministry/agency and in each province.</td>
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<tr>
<td>POA</td>
<td>Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam by 2005. Developed by NCFAW to guide the implementation of the first 5 years of the National Strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPRGS</td>
<td>Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy. Approved by the Prime Minister in May 2002. Draws together all relevant government strategies into a concrete plan for socio-economic development.</td>
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<tr>
<td>VWU</td>
<td>Vietnam Women’s Union is a socio-political organization. It operates throughout Vietnam at four levels - central, provincial, district and commune.</td>
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Reference documents

1. National Committee for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam leaflet
3. Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women in Vietnam by 2005
4. Statistics on Women and Men in Vietnam
5. Situation Analysis and Policy Recommendations to promote the Advancement of Women and Gender Equality in Vietnam
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