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Uncertain Horizon:
The Women's Question in Viet-Nam Revisited*

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A Cry of Viet-Nam

One hundred years,
or may be more,
I have been dressed
like a whore,
vested with guns,
as an angry warrior.
I have allowed
the violation
of my dignity
and the manipulation
of my sexuality.
I have spied
for many sides
of the liberation.
I have satisfied
the many needs
of the foreign legions.
I have put my faith
in the many faces
of emancipation.
I have swallowed my pains
my bitterness and shame,
for a tomorrow.

It is barely,
Tomorrow.
Already I see
another Me.
Miss 'Saigon',
in her new clothes,
getting on
with the fever of growth,
and trapped,
in
the promising romance,
with the fancy New Fifth Tiger.
I shiver
at the brutality of greed,
and the logic of need.
Heaven will only know,
how much more sorrow
must flow
to the Southern sea
before I could be Me.
(Truong, 1993)

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Abstract

This paper re-examines Viet-Nam's policy towards gender equality adopted since independence from four main angles: 1) the major determinants, characteristics and achievements of the policy prior to the reform process (*Doi-Moi*); 2) how gender relations interact with institutional changes introduced under *Doi-Moi*; 3) the impacts of such changes on women as producers and reproducers, 4) the prospect and challenges for the new gender policy. The paper argues that, from a historical perspective and notwithstanding its shortcomings, Viet-Nam's gender policy has substantially contributed to the improvement of women's social and political standing in the country. However, while Viet-Nam leadership formally declares its intent to protect women's interests and promotes women's participation in the reform programmes, in reality *Doi-Moi* contains several areas of gender biases which may be located in the redefinition of the boundaries of the 'public' and 'private', production and reproduction. These biases are currently undermining women's position. Unless the new gender policy currently carried out by the Vietnamese Women's Union takes into account the effects of the liberalisation of the market on gender relations, and how these effects are undermining women's position in the household, the market and in society, the strive towards gender equality as a principle enshrined in the country's constitution may be seriously curtailed, if not reversed.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Viet-Nam's reform process is varied and complex¹. An analysis of the reform process and the social transformation it accompanies must bear in mind the specificity of Viet-Nam's social environment. The legacy of war, revolution, internal conflict and international migration², has produced an environment in which social variables such as class, status, gender, age, ethnicity, and physical disability³ interact with each other in very specific ways, creating a heterogeneity of patterns of inequality in the relationship between men and women, both culturally and socio-economically. A parameter is needed for discussion, assessment of current trends, comparison with the past and projection into the future. Ways must be found to cut through the conflicting evidences in order to grasp the patterns of inequality, their determinants and implications.

Towards this end, the approach of this paper is essentially reflexive in that, although the choice of focus is placed on structural change and continuity in gender relations, efforts will also be made to relate such change to collective responses. The paper takes the position that structural characteristics of social relationships cannot be treated as intrinsically given, but as outcomes of an interplay between economic and political forces. Change and continuity of structural characteristics of gender relations articulated through social institutions reflect broader changes in the position of women in the political economy of the society. However, to be useful, an analysis of structural characteristics must be reflexive (or inter-active), in the sense that it must be able to treat structure and agency as dialectically related so as to capture the dimension of human agency in social change. Such an approach must be able to cast in broad terms the context under which men and women as social

¹ For a guide through the steps taken by the Vietnamese Government to reform the economy from the socialist subsistence model to market-led model see Appendix 1 on the milestones in the reform process.

² There are three forms of international migration: 1) labour contracts with Eastern European countries since 1980 and a number of oil producing countries such as Algeria and Iraq, 2) refugee outflows since 1975; and 3) Orderly Departure Programmes since the 1980s. Through remittances in the form of grants or loans by migrated members, many households were in a better position to respond to the liberalization of market than those who have not received such support.

³ According to Banister (1992:22), in 1989 Vietnam had a total number of physically disabled people which was close to 13 per cent of its population.

agents act in pursuit of their survival, interests and ideals, and the effects of their pursuit on social change.

The paper addresses some aspects of the following questions: What are the major determinants and characteristics of gender relations in Viet-Nam prior to the reform process (*Doi-Moi*)? How does *Doi-Moi* redefine major social institutions such as the family, the private sector, the collective, and the state? In which areas does this redefinition affect gender relations and the position of women as producers and reproducers? What characterises women's organised responses, and what are their implications? Accessible data only allows a discussion in broad sketches. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the paper will stimulate future inquiry on changing gender relations and economic reforms in Viet-Nam.

The paper is divided into two main parts. The first part re-examines the socialist paradigm on women's emancipation as applied in Viet-Nam, showing its treatment of production and reproduction as integrated part of one system as its main merit, mainly because this integration mirrors reality. It is argued that, although the state took a commanding role over women's interests, and although its 'benevolent' support to women was primarily stimulated by the need for a sustainable reproductive strategy that befitted the national goals in defense and socialist construction, relative gender equality was achieved in many dimensions. The initial erosion of women's social position coincided with the shift from a state-sponsored to a household-based reproductive strategy under the household contract system introduced in 1979. Accompanying this shift of policy was first and foremost a qualitative change in gender relations at the household and commune level, stimulated further by the increasing disintegration of social infrastructure that has supported women in their reproductive responsibilities to be on an equal footing with men at the work place. This shift of policy transfers the burdens of social reproduction onto families. Women are the main bearers of such burdens. Their work has become more intensified and invisible and old patterns of patriarchal control over women's labour and sexuality have re-emerged.

The second part deals with *Doi-Moi* as a reform programme characterized by a continuing separation between the productive and reproductive, the economic and the social, leading to anarchical reproductive strategies and a productive strategy which favours the male side of the gender hierarchy in its theoretical orientation as well as application. The end result of such a strategy is the trade-off between economic efficiency and social equality, comparable to Structural Adjustments Policies (SAPs) applied elsewhere. Families, firms, farms and state are entering a process of competition for efficiency and high productivity. The impacts of this process on gender relations, women's employment and access to resources are only beginning to become transparent in the country's human development⁴ index. According to the UNDP Human Development Report, in 1993 Viet-Nam's Human Development rank was 113, and in 1995 this rank has declined to 120. Accessible data show that women are suffering more from this decline. The long-term effects of this decline may render the formal protection of gender equality enshrined in the Constitution, the Family Codes and the Labour Codes, more of a suspended dream than a reality.

The paper concludes that there is a need to re-examine the trade-off between the principle of economic efficiency and social equity as applied in the process of *Doi-Moi*. Instead of viewing efficiency and equality as two opposite poles which are mutually exclusive, ways must be found to reconcile the two. As illustrated in the 1995 UNDP Human Development Report, it is not economically efficient to maintain a system with wide social disparities, particularly gender disparity, given the crucial role women play in the economy. There are costs of social division and instability which thus has not yet entered the economic calculus. Likewise, it is not socially equal to maintain a system of subsidies and entitlements restricted only to qualifiable members of the state-party apparatus. To allow the interaction of class and status as two sides of the same coin is to foster new

⁴ Truong (1992) shows that the concept of Human Development has been used with three different meanings: 1) human resources development (socio-economic), 2) participatory democracy (politic), 3) epistemological processes that provide a more holistic understanding of human beings and their social life (knowledge and cognition). Here the terms is used in the first meaning.

forms of economic inefficiency. Viet-Nam needs to bring the social question back on the policy agenda and find new policy approaches. For women in particular, it is important that the relationship between efficiency and equality is redefined so as to ensure a long-term perspective on a fair distribution of burdens of social reproduction that is operational and that can guarantee access to the majority of women.

PART I

1. THE SOCIALIST STATE AND GENDER RELATIONS IN VIETNAM

Historically, the issue of gender equality has been debated and acted upon in Viet-Nam long before it became framed as the Women's Question guided by socialist theory and morality. However, in no other period of Vietnamese history has the issue of gender equality been part of a major project of systemic change. The initiatives undertaken by the socialist state on the Women's Question between the 1940's and 1970's have brought far reaching consequences on the position of the majority of women in the country, and an undeniable qualitative shift of social consciousness on gender relations. However, since the reform was introduced in the 1980's, social indicators such as employment, health, education, and political representation show that the trends may be reversing. More significantly, old cultural practices that violate women's rights and dignity such as prostitution, early marriage, forced and arranged marriage, and concubinage have re-emerged. Simultaneously, new practices such as beauty contests, and new forms of sex-related entertainment known to have stimulated the commoditization of female sexuality (Truong, 1990) are allowed to be practised. New trends of trafficking in women to neighbouring countries have also surfaced⁵. Thus, women's changing position must be analyzed and understood from the standpoint of a major socio-economic, cultural and political shift.

The purpose of this section is to examine the merits and shortcomings of the socialist treatment of the Women's Question, and to locate the main areas through which the current shift in gender relations is taking place. The section will show that while the erosion of women's position may have been initially connected with market forces induced by the reform process, it became exacerbated by the abandonment of the socialist model which, in spite of many shortcomings, was supportive to women.

Treatment of the Women's Question by the socialist government of Viet-Nam may be delineated into four periods:

- * the period of struggle for national independence and socialist construction in the North (1930-1975);
- * the period of socialist construction in the whole country (1975-1980),
- * the period of 'socialist revitalisation' through pragmatic experiments with *ad-hoc* private production to meet consumption needs (1979-1985),
- * the period of 'Doi-Moi' or the building of a market-oriented economy linked with the regional and global economies (1988-present).

At each period, approaches to the Women's Question have been governed by a different rationale, fluctuating according to the changing definition of national goals. Generally, two main policy rationales may be delineated. From the 1930s to 1975, party and state approach to the Women's Question was marked by a dual position regarding the family, defined simultaneously as the major site of women's oppression and as a basic cell functional to social reproduction. From 1979 onwards, when experiments with private production were initiated until today, the family becomes redefined as a unit of production and reproduction, restoring many traits of patriarchal traditions. State definition of the family clearly mirrors wider political and socio-economic motives. Hence, state 'benevolence' towards women must be placed in perspective.

⁵ Interviews with officials in Hanoi confirm the new trend of trafficking in women to China.

1.1 Women, the Family and National Independence: The Trade-off between Traditional Culture and Modern Politics

The socialist approach to the Women's Question is characterized by the link made in marxist theory between production and reproduction as two integrated parts of one system. Accordingly, the social origins of women's oppression are located in the sphere of the family and kinship systems through which reproduction takes place. Although the marxist paradigm contains a blind spot on the social construction of sexuality and gender which influences its moral position towards women (Truong, 1990; Sayers et al., 1987; Vogel, 1985), it does take into account the reproductive sphere. Hence, the care-taking work women provide in the homes and its significance to the maintenance of human resources for production was not entirely taken for granted.

The Communist Party of Viet-Nam adopted the marxist paradigm on the Women's Question in the late 1920s as an instrument to mobilize women to participate in the struggle against French colonialism. After independence in the North in 1945, the struggle against the American-supported 'bourgeois' rule in the South continued until 1975. From the start, the Women's Question was directly linked with the question of national independence. Emphasis on the family as the origin of women's subordination was pronounced in 1930s and 1940s. Here, patriarchal features of feudal family forms and affiliated cultural practices abusive to women were denounced as the primary oppressor of the female sex. The control over women by patriarchal families were seen as a social force which prevented women's participation in the national struggle. The attack on the feudal family primarily aimed at breaking down patriarchal control and asserting Party's control over women. Restoring women's social dignity, self-respect, and social consciousness so as to release their potentials for national goals under the leadership of the Party were the major objectives of the campaigns on women's emancipation (Mai and Le, 1978).

Once national goals were achieved, considerable links were established between women's emancipation and the construction of socialism. Here, the emphasis on the family as a major source of women's oppression became less emphasized. Instead, policy rationale was shifted to the family as a basic cell that promotes social and economic stability through the reproduction and maintenance of generations of human beings whose emotions, vitality and labouring power should be directed at the achievement of socialism⁶. This shift of emphasis was by and large prompted by the protracted struggle in the South. There was a serious need to secure soldiers and to ensure maximum food supply for the front on a long-term basis, both of which depended on women. The major interest of the state in the North and the National Liberation Front in the South was to ensure that family reproductive needs were met without jeopardizing women's productivity. Women's productivity was crucial to the support of the war in the South and to the socialist construction project in the North.

Several clear implications emerged from this dual approach to the family. First, the removal of patriarchal structures in the family had led to a legal ban on arranged marriage, polygamy, concubinage and prostitution, and massive removal of cultural barriers to mobilize women in defense and production. The result of the attack on patriarchal structures has been a very progressive legal framework governing the man-woman relationship, and excellent achievements in the rate of female literacy, level of education, and participation in the national struggle in many fronts, i.e. production for the resistance army, defense, decision-making (Mai and Le, 1978; Maar, 1981).

Second, given state reliance on women's productivity for its efforts in defense, great care was taken so that women's double-burden would not undermine their productivity. Accordingly, the state provided massive support to women in their role as reproducers. Hand in hand with efforts to collectivize production, the state

⁶ This feature also characterizes other countries that have undergone the socialist experience (Moore, 1988:136-47; Duggan: 1995; Funk and Mueller, 1993)

also emphasised the socialization of reproductive work through the organisation of child care and creches at all level of production, firstly to lighten women's burdens for their effective participation in production, and secondly to influence the process of socialisation of their children (Le: 1991).

Third, due to the political significance of women's responsibility in all spheres of the society, an apparatus was set up, parallel to civil administration from the central to commune levels, to mobilize women in order to implement state policies, notably the Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU). State 'benevolence' towards women in this period served diverse national purposes with which many women have also identified themselves.

1.2 Re-unification and Socialist Construction: The Ideal Socialist Family and The Conflict over Gender Roles and Sexual Morality

After re-unification and between 1975-1980, state approach to the family as a reproductive unit still prevails, but took a conservative turn, possibly due to pressing problems of adjustment to the re-unification process. Socially, there has been a considerable shift in the lines of authority within family relations after decades of separation due to the war efforts, leading to many forms of inter-generational conflict as well as conflicts between genders (Mai, 1983). Politically, the reunification of the country under the control of one party has led to the disintegration of many families in the South, initially stimulated by the massive political re-education of members of the former South Vietnamese government, the coercive methods of implementation of the New Economic Zones⁷, and the subsequent flows of international migration. Economically, attempts to collectivize production in the South has met with more resistance than success, particularly in the Mekong Delta, and have triggered a steep decline in production (Ngo, 1994). This exacerbated the high rate of unemployment and underemployment among the southern population (Beresford, 1988).

It became apparent from state-party discourse on the family, which stressed stability, functional co-operation and female obedience, that women's vanguarding role was in essence a temporary and objective-specific assignment rather than something that was meant to induce further change. Women were told to observe family planning and child education in accordance with the wider social and economic goals of the state. Motherhood was glorified as women's noble and natural role which the state was benevolently returning to them. Although the Women's Union took part in this discursive shift, the organisation also initiated a counter-discourse through the campaign of the 'New Culture Family' which encouraged men and women to share decision-making and housework. This campaign reflects women's awareness of the double-edged nature of the glorification of motherhood. On the one hand, it is indisputable that family life has always occupied a central place in the worldview of Vietnamese people, and that marriage and motherhood still shape women's identity to a great extent. On the other hand, the emphasis on motherhood as belonging to the realm of 'nature' signifies that the recognition of women's work in the family may be placed at risk. In this respect, the 'New Culture Family' campaign mirrored women's contestation of state-defined notions of 'naturalness' and 'motherhood', as well as their emerging awareness of the social construction of gender.

At the societal level, the ideal type of family promoted by the state is far removed from the reality faced by many women. The return to family values exhibits a clear preference for an ideal nuclear structure. In 1976, this ideal type of family excluded more than eighteen per cent of households which were female-headed (Centre for Women's Studies, 1990: 19). For many women, their vanguarding role has meant major sacrifices

⁷ The New Economic Zones introduced in South Viet-Nam after re-unification in 1976 was essentially a population transfer programme from urban areas to rural and underpopulated areas to solve problems of urban unemployment. The programme was ill prepared, poorly implemented and monitored and led to frustration by the transferred population, many of whom eventually returned to urban areas and/or fled abroad.

in so far as family life and motherhood is concerned⁸. However, a major vestige of decades of war was, and still is, an imbalance between the male and female population concentrated in specific areas and groups of cohorts (Viet-Nam Population Census, 1989). In consequence, women who have dedicated their youth to the front only found themselves in a situation where they are considered as 'unmarriageable' due to many factors, particularly their age, physical appearance and broken ties of kinship by their own involvement in the revolution. In defiance of the traditional value for marriage, paternity and state-defined motherhood, many women pursued their search for family warmth through alternative forms of human bonding. Such unions include mothers with children born out of wedlock, or adopted children, union between two or more unmarried women (VWU, 1989:32).

In a cultural environment that favours women's identity as mothers and a demographic reality that prevents motherhood within marriage, i.e. the continuing male preference for younger women and a larger adult female population, the conservative emphasis on nuclear family norms generated a conflict over sexual morality in which the legal identity of mothers with children born or adopted out of wedlock came into question. Initially, these unions were formally categorized as 'improper' or morally 'deviant' by the society and state. Several women living under so-called 'deviant' unions were penalized with dismissal from their jobs⁹, being seen as subversive to socialist morality on the family.

However, given the significant scale of so-called 'deviancy' and the socio-political origins of many single women living under alternative unions, it became unviable for the state to support unfair practices towards them. Hence, in the course of the 1980s the state had to reconsider its moral position and to take into account the significance of the subjective dimension of love and the family, the effects of the war on personal relationships, the gender imbalance in the population, and the prevalence of patriarchal culture which excluded unmarried women from the entitlement to motherhood. Legal regulations have been introduced to protect the rights of single-mothers to recognize their children as legitimate entities. This regulation was later extended to also cover orphans adopted by single-mothers. Thus, although patriarchal culture still prevails and may continue to stigmatizes unwed motherhood at the societal level, legally the status of unwed mothers is recognized in the law with all the social rights accorded to mothers within marriage.

1.3 Revitalization of the Socialist model¹⁰: Patriarchy and Gender Conflict over Recognition and Resources

During the period of 'socialist revitalization' (1981-1985) further contradictions emerged on the state approach to the family, directly related to the shift of emphasis to its function as a unit production. Initially, the return to the family as a unit of production started in the form of *Khoan*, or household contract system, introduced clandestinely as an efficient means of resources utilisation to solve the problem of food shortage. The *ad-hoc* nature of this contract during the first five years of its existence was an expression of the general search by the leadership for a viable model of development to efficiently meet the reproductive needs of the country without jeopardizing the objective of socialist construction.

⁸ Personal communications by former women vanguards.

⁹ Personal communication by members of the Women's Union at a commune level in 1991.

¹⁰ Gates and Truong (1992) have noted 'socialist revitalization' as a strategy was characterized by a continuing commitment to the socialist model of development, accompanied by more open attitudes to spontaneous grassroots changes sanctioned by *ad hoc* official reforms. As such the period does not show any policy based on a consistent and well thought out rationale. Rather the period showed a patchwork of measures to revitalize the socialist model aiming at more efficient use of resources within as well as outside the state sector.

According to Appelton (1983: 295), this system was first 'discovered' in 1979 in the rice and vegetable collectives in Hai-Phong's green belt in the Red River Delta. The household contract began as system of putting out labour process from collectives to households, mainly in jute production to take up slack resources (under utilized labour, under-exploited small-scale management skills). This putting out system attracted mainly the female labour force for additional family income measured by work points and paid in rice. In 1980 some coops begun to also put out land and animal husbandry to households. In 1981, paddy fields were also leased to peasant households, marking the beginning of the household contract system as a major unit of agricultural production replacing the farm coops (Dao, 1995). The success of this system in agricultural production¹¹ led to its sanction in industrial production as well, particularly in light manufacturing such as garments and handicrafts.

Family policy during this period was primarily governed by the rationale of efficient utilization of resources to meet income needs of families. Gender relations and the sexual division of labour were no more a policy concern. Rather, the 'flexibility' of integrating production and reproduction at the household level was recognized as crucial to women's productivity. In 1984, the Council of Minister introduced a resolution¹² concerning the reallocation of female labourers aiming at the diversification of forms of women's employment, and sanctioning homeworking as a flexible arrangement suitable for women in their double-role as mothers and producers in agriculture as well as industry. An excerpt of this resolution reads: 'In some cases, women should be assigned work that may be done at home, and flexible working timetable should be arranged for female labourers'. For women, the return to the family as a unit of production raises three significant issues: a) the visibility of their work and the accounting system for its remuneration, b) the shift of the balance of burden-sharing in reproduction, c) the re-emergence of male authority over income and decision-making.

Under the collectivized system, 'all members of the collective are members of a production brigade and elect their brigade head from among the members. Brigades heads elect the collective's management committee. The management committee decides the work of the collective and apportions it among the production brigades' (Appelton, 1983: 279)¹³. The remuneration system for co-ops members was based on work-points assessed by a scheme of performance and production standards, taking into account the strength of the worker and the difficulty of the job¹⁴. Women's work in the field was remunerated, although the manual activities they performed (e.g. transplanting, weeding, harvesting) were sometimes considered as 'non-technical' and therefore 'less important'. Through the work points, their contribution to family income was more visible. In addition, as family income heavily depended on production on the family plot (vegetable, animal husbandry) managed mainly by women, the visibility of women's earning capacity was more enhanced (White, 1983). According to Dao (1995), already in 1979 and 1982, under the co-operative structure, the household economy contributed 60 to 70 per cent of family income. It is clear that collectivised production had marginal effects on family income and that the household economy has been the most resilient unit in insuring family welfare. However, collectivised production did provide women with double source of recognition for their work

¹¹ According to Dao (1995) in 1979 and 1982, the household economy contributed 40 to 60 per cent of all production.

¹² N. 176 a/HDBT, December 24, 1984.

¹³ Co-ops members contributed 95 per cent of their land, and kept 5 per cent as individual plot for family subsistence. In principle, contribution was supposed to voluntary. In practice, throughout the collectivization programme, a great degree of coercion took place which led to considerable dissatisfaction and unrest among the peasantry, and subsequently decline of output (Ngo, 1994).

¹⁴ For example a cooperative of jute growers in Hai Hung province paid extra maternity leave and free food rations for pensioners as a compensation for the hard work in getting the jute (Appelton, 1983: 281).

and income, i.e. the work points and the family plot.

By contrast, the household contract converges two parts of the economic system in one unit, namely reproduction and production, which implies less visibility and more intensification of women's work. Production brigades ceased to exist. Agricultural workers become family labourers whose work load and remuneration are not determined by any objective norms, rather by subjective gender-based definition of productive and unproductive work. Research conducted in the Red River Delta indicated that since the household contract was introduced, farmers' perception on family income is becoming biased towards men. i.e. they tend to see men as the major income earners (Tuong Lai, 1992). Whereas the co-operatives 'deconstructed' the household and made the contribution of all members visible, the household-contract system reassembles the household and renders the contribution of individual members invisible, and hence enhances gender conflict over resource control. Such conflict is manifested through the intensity of domestic violence for which legal measures became necessary. Equally necessary was the legal recognition of housework as productive work now that the state has sanctioned homeworking officially.

With regard to the issue of burden-sharing, once the state assigned the family/household¹⁵ the basic task to take care of itself economically, it also left the family/household free to devise its strategy to mobilize resources and to secure its own reproductive needs. Attention was no longer given to a collective reproductive strategy. According to White (1983: 50), already at the beginning of the new system of agricultural production, co-op staff providing social services such as organized child care during planting and harvesting seasons found it more lucrative to take up household contracts. Hence, rural creches had difficulty getting staff. The deterioration of co-op welfare functions was further exacerbated as labour allocation became more dependent on market forces, and as the state became less interested in intervention and more willing to transfer its previous 'benevolent' control over equal distribution to the household head.

For women, organized social services were crucial even though they might have been unevenly distributed, and sometimes seasonal. Through such services, women agriculturalists could find substitute labour or delegate tasks if they were ill or pregnant, and were entitled to sick leave and maternity leave without loss to family income. As the result of state neglect, the decline and gradual disappearance of social services for women agricultural producers as a unique gain from socialist efforts at women's emancipation, had been almost invisible until the later period when the general fiscal crisis of the state affecting the education and health sectors became transparent¹⁶.

To conclude this section, it may be stated that the Women's Question, treated within the parameter of nationalism and socialism, has been subject to a constant trade-off between two main principles, i.e. efficiency and equality. During the struggle for independence the Vietnamese leadership has opted for a trade-off between culture as the bedrock of gender inequality, and politics as the heart of efficient mass mobilization for social equality. To some extent, it may be said that patriarchal culture could be sacrificed only in so far as this sacrifice would lead to greater women's participation in the revolution. Once the national objective of reunification was achieved, patriarchal culture re-emerged through the trade-off between gender equality and economic efficiency. Thus, in spite of the rights and political space women gained through decades of struggle, as the reform deepens this trade-off is narrowing women's alternatives and options, and will likely further erode their socio-economic position.

¹⁵ In Viet-Nam the concepts of the family and household are used interchangeably. Here, 'family' is used to mean the social construction of a unit either by blood ties or intimate social bonds. 'Household' is used to mean an economic unit that may involve 'family' members or hired labour.

¹⁶ According to the Ministry of Education (1991: 40) the total number of creches in the country has fallen from 41, 977 in 1985 to 13,348 during the school year of 1989-90 or by 2/3.

PART II

2. WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AND THE MASCULINIZATION OF THE ECONOMY

The introduction of *Doi-Moi* in 1988 which allows market forces to restructure the organisation of production in agriculture, industry and services has accelerated the process of gender disparity in many ways. There are signs that the leadership has anticipated the costs of the reforms expected to be borne by women, particularly given the gender conflicts that were triggered by the earlier experiments with the household contract system. Before showing firmer commitment to the reforms and allowing the restructuring process to deepen, greater sensitivity was shown by the leadership to gender relations in the family through the introduction of the comprehensively revised Family Codes in 1986 which forbids domestic violence and stipulates that housework must be viewed as a contribution to family income when assessing common property. In addition, the political space accorded to the Women's Union was also widened through the introduction of a regulation of the Council of Ministers (N. 163/HDBT, October 19th, 1988) on the participation of the Women's Union in state management at all levels, to monitor and suggest policies related to women and children. In 1994, the Labour Laws were introduced with Chapter 10 devoted entirely to the rights of women workers. In particular, Article 110 of this chapter stipulates that firms employing women in large numbers will benefit from special treatment by the state through tax deductions, thus providing an incentive to protect and promote women's employment. Article 117 gives women workers who adopt infants the right to leave of absence with social benefits, thus providing formal recognition of social motherhood. These actions mirror the continuing state support to the principle of gender equality in the legal sphere while it retreats itself from a commanding role over the economy.

Against this background, a major question that needs answering is why and how the reform process is able to marginalise women's position in the long-term. Several tentative lines of inquiry may be suggested. Firstly, by linking itself with the regional and global economies Viet-Nam must also maintain its competitive edge. Hence, the country cannot avoid being affected by the same patterns of streamlining and logic of efficiency characterising the current global process of economic restructuring. As Brodie (1994) has pointed out, economic restructuring involves the re-alignment of the social, political and economic through the reconstitution of gender relations and the re-definition of the boundaries of the 'private' and 'public', shifting state social responsibilities to domestic enclaves. In Viet-Nam, the reconstitution of gender relations already occurred during the 1980s through the rupture of the systemic link between production and reproduction, previously accorded a central position in government policy towards women. The negative effects of this rupture have been initially overshadowed by the income effects of privatisation of production. Hence, women have in fact welcome the new reconstitution of gender relations (Hoang, 1994). This support is however wearing out, since income gains are being offset by the loss of their time, mobility and ability to broaden their awareness (*Phu Nu Va Khoa Hoc*, N.1, 1990). These losses might have placed limits on their scope to strategize with a long-term perspective and to develop an adequate collective response to macro-economic changes.

Secondly, at the cultural and political level the leadership shows no clear sense of direction, a 'project' for social transformation so to speak. Although the economic objectives of the reforms are clear, how the state will continue to maintain the principle of social equality and gender equality, for which it claims total responsibility, is less transparent. In so far as gender is concerned, the discontinuity of the socialist model with its position on the Women's Question, however limited, has not been replaced by an alternative vision with clear implications on systemic change. The leadership seems to have opted for a pragmatic approach which is to equip women with legal and political instruments to fight for and negotiate their interests as gender conflicts emerge.

Hence, gender-specific policy approaches have no systematic orientation. Rather, they are based on

a contradictory patchwork guided by a combination of welfare and anti-poverty strategies without sufficient linkages with the macro environment. As a result, the logic of efficiency which operates on principles favouring the male side of gender hierarchy is able to gain momentum. In what follows, the paper will highlight the male biases of economic restructuring based on a brief review of literature, and will relate the discussions to the Vietnamese situation.

2.1 The Gender of Viet-Nam's Reform Process (*Doi-Moi*)

Elson's pioneering work (1991, 1993, 1994) on gender and Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) locates the phenomenon of male bias at the level of conceptual and theoretical reasoning. Essentially, she argues that SAPs may be seen as a switch of resources from the production of non-trade goods (e.g. public goods such as health, education, housing, social services), to tradable commodities (privately produced cash crops and export goods). This switch is made dependable on the rule of market allocation rather than planned allocation.

Despite the absence of people in macro-economic policy and measurement, Elson argues that there exist major sources of bias in SAPs due to the built-in assumptions about the economy, the market and the household. In this regard, male biases may be traced in three main areas of conceptualisation:

1. the narrow view of the economy which overlooks, takes for granted, or does not problematize much of the work that women do in the maintenance of the labour force;
2. the view of the market based on the false assumption of free and fair competition between men and women, whereas in reality men and women are allocated into different socio-economic and cultural positions that have implications on their access to productive resources and employment;
3. the treatment of the household as an autonomous economic agent, a unity for policy purposes, whereas in reality such unity rarely exists. Instead, intra-household relations are imbued with diverse forms of power relations affecting gender discrepancy in decision-making, resource allocation and distribution.

Given these conceptual biases, the implementation of SAPs has created patterns of distortions in gender relations across the globe that are strikingly similar (Blumberg, et.al, 1995; Bakker, 1994; Aslambeigui et.al., 1994; Gladwin, 1991). On the question of employment and social security, a major effect of restructuring has been the shedding of the public sector and formal private sector, creating an apex of labour relations whereby the majority of the labour force, many of whom are women, stand at the bottom and support the top. Labour relations at the bottom of this apex are governed by a new putting out system characterized by sub-contracting or piece work, flexible arrangements highly dependent on the market fluctuations, lack of security and respect for workers rights. Economic restructuring maintains the majority of the labour force at the fringe of capitalism, a condition which was applicable mainly to women and children in early phases of industrialisation. From that perspective, SAPs turn the old putting out system into a new and globalized system of production, and enhances new patterns of competition between men and women.

Thus, notwithstanding the new employment opportunities that have been created through the liberalization of the market, many studies have challenged the assumption on the free competition between men and women. In the so-called informal sector, women's lack of mobility, representative power, and collateral denies them from access to financial resources to diversify their income. New employment opportunities in the export-oriented sector have tended to provide access only to young unmarried women for whom the costs of maternity leave and child care are not yet applicable. Evidence shows that in many Asian countries, young women recruits have to sign non-renewable contracts which do not permit them to marry within the contract period¹⁷. Moreover, it has been also demonstrated that women's ability to response to market opportunities

¹⁷ Evidence from China suggest that this form of contract is quite widespread in join-venture enterprises (Truong and Thakur, 1995:6).

depended highly on their class and other social memberships, and the composition of household members that are able or willing to share the burden of reproductive work. Among the poorest strata, women's income earning capacity is seriously curtailed by a downward spiral in terms of their time, mobility as well as gender-based entitlements to training, education and health defined at the household level. Not only women must devote more efforts to housework and child care which reduce their available time and mobility for re-training, gender-based entitlements defined at household level can also act in their disfavour (Roldan, 1985; Afshar, 1991; 1992; Beneria and Feldman, 1992). This downward spiral seriously impedes their ability to compete with men in the market, unless they can find labour substitutes for housework and child care. As and when they do, labour substitutes usually involves other women or female children. The long-term effects of this downward spiral will eventually be borne by the female sex.

The gendered impacts of *Doi-Moi* may be traced along the following lines: 1) changing access to resources and employment opportunities, 2) changing access to public services, 3) how the effects of such changes are reflected in the shift of women's position in the occupational structure.

Gender Relations and the Land Issue

Doi-Moi began with the adoption of Resolution 10 in 1988, supplemented by the Land Law of 1993 with clearer terms of land use rights. The Resolution was directed at stimulating the household economy to become an independent unit of production and to acquire a central role in agricultural development. According to Le (1990) and Dao (1995) although in theory, the state remains the sole owner of the land, land may now be leased to peasants households directly to invest and produce. The co-ops retain only the supporting function such as the provision of services with user fees and no longer the management function. In principle, land can be leased to peasants on varying terms depending on the crops and soil condition, i.e. 20 years for rice, over 50 years for perennial crops such as coffee and rubber. The household is independent in the management of production on the contracted land, and has total control over its produce. In return, it is to pay tax relative to the worth of its produce. The amount of leased land is linked with the number of labouring family members.

The initial impacts of the Resolution 10 on agricultural production have been highly positive. Agriculture is now contributing 34.5 per cent to GDP and income level has increased for the majority of the rural population compared to the 1975-80 period (State Planning Committee, 1993). Agriculture still absorbs over 70 per cent of the total labour force and is now firmly based on family farming. The impacts of this resolution on gender relations and women are mainly related to the division of labour in the homes and on the farms, as discussed earlier. In addition, there are two major gender-specific impacts that merit attention: 1) the control over women's sexuality now that the family has become a major unit of production and reproduction, and 2) the process of land dispossession emanating from an increased work burden on two fronts, the family farm and the home, now that cooperatives have ceased to function in many areas.

With regard to the control over women's sexuality, the family is now treated as productive unit, a cooperative unit whose basic entitlement to land is the sum of the entitlements of all members. This provides families with the incentive to acquire more members to enlarge its entitlement to land, either through birth or marriage. Research in Red River Delta shows that there has been an increase in premature marriage (marriage of girls younger than 18) to acquire more labour and land (UNIFEM, 1994: 41). There is also an accelerated process of nuclearization of families to set up their own farms, and an increased pressure on women to produce heirs (Tuong Lai, 1992).

Moreover, although an egalitarian family structure is promoted by the state, only the nuclear form was given due recognition during the process of land allocation. The land laws established during the land reform programme (1953-1956) gave widows and wives with absent husbands equal eligibility with male heads of households (Appelton, 1983: 278). The new land law has retained the principle of equal access, but recognized

only women in relation to the nuclear family structure. When first introduced in 1988, the new land law excluded unmarried women (*Phu Nu Co Don*)¹⁸ with dependents as qualified beneficiaries, since they do not constitute what is morally regarded as a 'proper family'. With the support of the VWU, single women have demanded and obtained the right of access to leased land along criteria applied to a family, followed by the recognition of their families as legal entities¹⁹. Potential dispute may also arise in the case of divorced or separated women who are now dependent on the male head of household and the local Land Commission for compensation (UNIFEM, 1994).

With regard to the process of land dispossession, although land may be allocated in egalitarian norms, processes of mobilization of labour and technology to work on the land greatly depends on the capability of the household heads and the composition of the household. According to Tuong Lai (1992) the accelerated process of nuclearization of the family in response to the incentive on land allocation have brought many families into economic difficulties. Many nuclear families have started with no initial capital and technology²⁰ and could only survive at subsistence level. It may be expected that such families are prone to migration, either wholly or partly. The Living Standard Survey of 1993, points to a significant rate of male absence among the household surveyed. Male migration partially explains the high rate of *de-facto* female heads of household.

Rural female-headed households face enormous problems to mobilize labour (Hoang, 1994). In an agricultural economy with relatively low technological inputs like Viet-Nam, labour constitutes an important resource which, as any other resource, can be qualitatively and quantitatively differentiated. Improvement of the quality of labour and efficient labour allocation in agricultural production, and sidelines activities for the diversification of income greatly depend on the flexibility of household structures.

Le (1993: 26) points out that, nationwide the number of women who are widows, divorced or separated is 10 times higher than men living in the same status. The proportion of female-headed households is above 23 per cent of the total number of households (World Bank, 1994: 16). In certain localities, this proportion can be high as 27 to 40 and 50 per cent (Le, 1990: 6; 1993: 29). A common feature of the female-headed households is that women must carry the bulk of the burden of work, having to combine work in the fields with housework if they cannot afford to find substitution through hired labour or other means. Such households have the least flexibility in labour allocation. Reportedly, women in such households barely earn sufficient rice for the family. They cannot protect their sideline crops such as cassava from theft, and have no time to devote to animal husbandry (Nguyen, 1990: 29). Overtime, although land has been allocated to them, they are unable to produce enough to meet their subsistence and to pay tax. Many end up transferring their land use rights to other families and become waged workers on other farms. There appears to be a process of land dispossession which is gender-specific and is by and large stimulated by women's double-burden.

Finally, although the household economy has been assigned by the state a central role in agricultural production, at present, state action to support this economy is weak. According to UNDP (1990: 87) between 1976-1989, nationwide 69.2 per cent of households operated under the cooperative framework. In the North, this percentage range between 90 per cent to 98.2 per cent. In the South, the central coastal areas collectivized production reached 91.1 per cent, whereas in the Mekong Delta only 6.9 per cent. Resolution 10 broke up the

¹⁸ The term *Phu Nu Co Don* literally means Lonesome Women, and expresses the deeply seated value Vietnamese people place on marriage and the family. A woman without a husband is considered as an incomplete human being who is lonely.

¹⁹ Their struggle had been catalytic to the recognition of social motherhood in the Labour Law which allows women with adopted children the right to maternity leave.

²⁰ Tuong Lai explains that under decades of collectivized production, farmers have not invested in their own tools. The few large machineries belonging to the co-ops were liquidated, and hand tools were divided among families in accordance with the amount of land allocated at the beginning of de-collectivisation.

cooperative framework, affecting the North and the central coastal areas more seriously. The old cooperatives are shifting from management to services delivery, but very slowly and with difficulty. At present, only 10 to 20 per cent existing co-operatives are able to function in their new roles, primarily in agricultural extension (Dao, 1995). There is no evidence suggesting that functioning co-ops are taking up welfare functions. New forms of cooperation have also emerged from initiatives of mass organizations (farmers, youth, and women). They too focus primarily on the productive side of the household economy. With agriculture being the backbone of the economy and women the backbone of agriculture, the continuing neglect of the reproductive and social side of the household economy will likely increase gender disparity in the agricultural sector, and ultimately the disparity between urban and rural areas will be further enhanced.

Gender and the Restructuring of Industries and Services

Industries and services in Viet-Nam are managed by three sectors, 1) the state which include state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and public services, 2) collectivized production, and 3) private production. SOEs are administered by line ministries, half of which are located in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and are dominant not so much in the total number of people they employ, but in terms of their power and prestige derived from the legacy of Viet-Nam's socialist model based on heavy industry. Major technology intensive products, including export and export-processing, are state-owned (metallurgy, coal, marine products, rubber, oil). Collectivized industrial production and private production covers mainly labour intensive activity such as handicrafts, food processing, textiles, garments, assembly production, and small scale services. Primary production of exports products e.g. rice, coffee, fruits remains in private hands, although trading is in the hands of the state (World Bank, 1993: 45-46).

In 1988, the state sector (SOEs and public services) employed about 15 per cent of the total labour force. Women constitute 49 per cent of the total number of state employees (Duong, 1992). By 1991, about 1/3 of the total number of state employees have been retrenched (World Bank, 1993). Two main policy instruments have been applied to streamline the state sector, notably fiscal policy that reduces government spending in the social sector (health and education), and withdrawal of subsidies to SOEs to force them to operate on a competitive basis.

As will be shown later, women's employment in health and education have not been seriously affected. In SOEs however, women predominate in many supporting services functions that are most vulnerable to cuts. Interviews with the Working Women Department of the Confederation of Labour suggest that there are about 1 million people who have been retrenched from production since 1990. The percentage of women in the process of retrenchment fluctuates between 50% to 70%, depending on sectors. Retrenched women without an alternative have had to accept hard labour jobs in construction, lumbering and rock polishing which were formerly forbidden to women by protective legislation.

Moreover, the restructuring of industries involves a process of skills redefinition, reassessment of qualifications and wage setting, particularly with regards to contract workers. This process has been left entirely to the authority of the enterprise director (World Bank, 1993: 66) without the mediation of a third party. Such discretion increases women's vulnerability to dismissal as well as to reallocation to lower-level jobs. For those who have been reallocated to new positions, evidence collected from interviews suggested that gender ideology regarding skills and wages has played a central role in women's reallocation to lower ranking jobs or redundancy. Women have no choice but to accept their new position. In some cases they have to pay bribes to be re-hired²¹.

Furthermore, as a general rule, the costs of pregnancy, maternity leave and child care make women

²¹ Personal communication by garments workers in Ho Chi Minh City.

less able to compete with men in the employment market since few enterprises are ready to take on such costs. Firms tend to select women of the pre-reproductive age to avoid social costs of maternity leave. Women who went on maternity leave, come back to their job to see that it has been filled by some else (*Phu-Nu Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh*, 29/4/1992). Women's vulnerability in the labour market is further enhanced by state withdrawal of supporting services, such as child care provision. Currently, the question may be raised as to how new institutional mechanisms can be developed to support working mothers, and to what extent the state as an authority should continue to take the lead. Without solving this question, women will be left with less time to work for pay, or have to increase their work load, leaving them with less time to educate themselves for new job opportunities.

The current options for women in industrial employment is the informal sector predominated by family enterprises. It has been estimated that at present some 70 per cent of the labour force in the informal sector are women (UNIFEM, 1994). This sector is characterised by a high degree of fragmentation of the production process with limited possibility for skill enhancement, isolation of workers, lack of supportive services, irregular working hours, and remuneration by piecework. Furthermore, as the work they perform occurs in the realm of the home, the control over their labour and income can become subject to traditional structures of male power. Over time, the issues they face regarding division of labour, control over technology and income eventually become invisible to policy-makers if there is no active intervention to find out how labour standards are respected. Isolation can also lead to competition among women and thus can carry serious implications for organizing collectively to negotiate for better conditions.

For most women, there appears to be a complementarity between the provision of services required for their development and the ability to gain from participation in the market. Although the recently introduced Labour Codes stipulates that firms are not allowed to discriminate against women on the grounds of pregnancy, in reality without an effective scheme of cost-sharing it is difficult to see how this code can be enforced. Various incentives have been proposed such as tax alleviation for firms who employ many women. More options of cost-sharing should be explored²². This, however, requires an ideological shift back to Viet-Nam's previous position that reproduction and production are two integral part of an economic system, and hence reproductive responsibilities must be shared not only between husbands and wives but also between the state, the community and production agents.

Gender and Class Discrepancy in Alleviation of Social Costs of Adjustment Programmes

There are four main programmes to help alleviate social costs of adjustment faced by workers who have been retrenched from the public sector. These include 1) severance pay or a compensation to state employees when they are laid off or agree to leave voluntarily, 2) early retirement with pension benefits, 3) training programmes to help the unemployed search for new jobs, and 4) job creation programmes through credit.

Gender discrepancy in government efforts to alleviate social costs of adjustment may be traced through the discrepancy in wages, age of retirement and access to training programmes and credit sources. As female wages in Viet-Nam are on average 70% lower than male wages (Living Standard Survey, 1993), women tend to get less severance pay which is based on seniority and pay scale. Furthermore, as the required age for

²² For example, in China several alternatives of reproductive cost-sharing schemes have been introduced involving the establishment of social funds at firms level based on a tri-partite contribution (state, firm, workers). Reproductive costs may also be shared between the wife's employer and the husband's employer (interviews with researchers at the Institute of Population Studies, Fudan University, Shanghai). Another example is the *Help For Working Parents Plan* developed by Bergman at the American University and Hartmann (1995) of the Institute of Women's Policy Research in Washington D.C., the USA. This plan contains two key instruments, i.e. help with health insurance, and help with child care. The plan is targeted at single- and dual-parent households among low-income groups.

retirement is earlier for women than men, for women early retirement means less years of work and hence less pension benefits.

Nation-wide, the government has established some 55 training centres throughout the country to help retrenched workers acquire new skills in demand by the market economy. The Women's Union also runs its own training centres at district levels, charging a user fee. It is not known how much funds the Union get from the national and/or provincial budget to run these training programmes. Field observations in Ho Chi Minh City and Tien An province in the Mekong Delta indicate that such training centres may have received some support in terms of equipment from the district and provincial budget, and salaries of administrative staff. But teachers' salaries are mainly paid from user fees. Hence, women's training centres must be made accessible to those who are able to afford the costs of training, regardless of their sex. In the long run, if market principles are allowed to operate without constraints, women's training centres will lose its function in supporting and protecting women's interests as women must now compete with men for access. Already now, many men are attending training programmes offered by women's centres, some are learning new skills such as computer, some are learning the female-stereotyped skills such as sewing and cooking for access to jobs in restaurants and factories. Market mechanisms have begun to allow men to compete with women in access to services that are in principle reserved for women as social group more adversely affected by the reforms.

With regard to job creation through credit, there are several sources of government funds, the largest being the Rural Credit Programme for the Vietnamese Bank of Agriculture (VBA) and the National Credit Programme for Job Creation (NCPJC). The Rural Credit Programme of VBA does not consider gender to be a criteria. Out of a total of 10 million households in the country, 4 million of which are considered to be poor, VBA reached some 2.4 million households, of which some 90 per cent borrowers are men and households of the upper middle class (Tran and Allen, 1992). This trend is also confirmed by the World Bank's study (1994) which concludes that most of government funds for poverty alleviation have been channelled to former members of state-party apparatus.

For its part, as a nation-wide programme, the NCPJC was extended to 35 provinces/cities in 1994, with an overall budget of Vietnamese Dong (VND) 240 billion (USD 24 million). NCPJC's aim is to provide credit to capable small-scale entrepreneurs to set up their business and to generate employment to absorb redundant workers. In reality, there is no binding obligation for small-scale entrepreneurs to secure employment opportunities for the redundant work force. In that regard the extent to which NCPJC has contributed to the alleviation of unemployment problems is questionable.

Interviews with the Women's Union in Hanoi reveals that the organisation has been able to tap funding sources from the NCPJC. Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU) has received VND 9 billion from the central budget, a very small proportion in comparison to the total budget. In addition to the central budget, the VWU also gets larger amounts from provincial credit sources, for instance VND 4-5 billion from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh city each. Fiscal decentralization limits the possibilities of the organisation to overcome provincial disparities to reach out to the poorest households in remote areas. Credit sources for these areas are made available through international organisations, the administrative costs of which are evidently being borne by borrowers²³.

While insufficient data does not permit an extensive discussion on credit programmes and its effectiveness in employment creation, it is clear that women get a very small share of government financial sources. Even if they do get the credit, it remains unclear as to the degree of control they have over the income earned.

²³ According to a tour report of an OXFAM officer, project number VN-152, 22/7 to 27/7/1994, OXFAM provides the loan funds to women, and Commune-level VWU administers the loans and also mobilises savings. In the savings programmes, the borrowers pay 1 per cent interest per month, the depositors get 0.5 per cent and the Commune VWU gets 0.5 per cent to cover administration costs.

Fiscal Reforms and Gender Differentiated Access to Education and Health

Viet-Nam has always been proud of the fact that despite being of the poorest countries in the world, it has an extensive social infrastructure and relatively high rates of access to education and health. But this position is being threatened by fiscal reforms introduced since the beginning of the reforms, with worrying signs of negative gender differentiated impacts. Compared to other countries in the region²⁴, Viet-Nam has a high adult female literacy rate, but in relation to men in the country's female literacy is lower. The 1989 census suggests that among the population above 10 years of age, 88 percent of the population are literate. Male literacy rate stood at 93 nationwide, 97 percent in urban areas, and 92 per cent in rural areas. Female literacy stood at 84 percent national wide, 92 in urban areas, and 82 in rural areas (*Vietnam 1989 Population Census, Sample Results, 1990, p. 44, 45, 46*).

The rates of participation in formal education shown in Table 1 reveals on average that there are less women attending school than men. The male-female discrepancy was marginal at primary level in rural as well as urban areas, but became marked at age group 15 to 19. This means that less young women than young men attend and complete school beyond primary level, particularly in rural areas. The 1989 census also shows a picture on higher education which reflects a similar pattern, i.e. there are more women with degrees in middle vocational education than men, and more men with degrees in college and university education. This means that most women who have a chance to complete their education cannot go beyond the vocational level. Higher education is still male dominated.

Table 1. Participation in school by age group, sex and area of residence

	Male (rural)	Male (urban)	Female (rural)	Female (urban)
5-9	62.4	73.8	61.7	74.0
10-14	78.0	87.5	71.1	86.0
15-19	26.8	37.7	16.5	34.0

Source: Vietnam Population Census 1989, Sample Results 1990, p. 52

Moreover, women's access to education has been further undermined by fiscal reforms which have reduced spending on education²⁵ and have introduced user fees. As has been pointed out (World Bank 1994), the trends in school enrolment (1987-1993) reveal a drop since 1989 at secondary and upper secondary level, although enrolment at secondary level has begun to improve. Enrolment at primary level has increased since 1989, while enrolment at post secondary level has declined steadily. Evidence also suggests there are wide disparities in both literacy and school enrolment rates. Female enrolment is lower at all levels of schooling, particularly in the remote regions of the North and the centre, and in the Mekong Delta (World Bank, 1993: 188). National-wide, female enrolment is lower than male at the secondary and tertiary level (World Bank, 1994: 80-81).

In Viet-Nam, as in many other countries, access to education is also determined by patriarchal views about the worth of women. Education is often seen at the household level as social investment for which gender

²⁴ e.g. China 55%, Bangladesh 22% (Kaufman and Sen; 1994:p.236).

²⁵ Government expenditures on education has improved since 1993, i.e. 12% of total expenditure compared to 6% and 8% in 1986 and 1989 respectively (World Bank, 1993: 192).

differentiated costs and benefits are accounted for by family members. Data collected from Quang Ninh Province (Truong, 1991) suggests that with the fiscal reforms followed by the introduction of education fees at all levels of the system side by side with the stimulation of family production, many families consider the opportunity costs of female education too high. Hence, girls tend to be withdrawn from schools to help the family business where they can produce more tangible benefits.

Access to health has also been deteriorating with strong interprovincial disparities, particularly as regards gender-specific health needs. Fiscal decentralization means that health facilities at the grass-roots level must raise their own funds to continue to function. Women have specific health needs related to their reproductive function that are met mainly through health care services provided at the primary level. A deterioration of services at this level has affected women adversely. For example, the maternal death rate has increased substantially in the last decade, from 90 per 100 000 births in 1975 to 140 in 1988 (UNICEF, 1990: 164). Particularly in rural areas, despite the existence of safe-delivery services the user rates are low, mainly due to distance and lack of transport together with economic constraints. According to the World Bank, 42 per cent of women in poorest households surveyed gave birth to their last child at home, and less than half of them went for prenatal visits (World Bank, 1994). Kaufman and Sen note that this trend is more prevalent in central and southern provinces (Kaufman and Sen, 1994: p. 243).

In addition, high rates of gynaecological infections are also recorded (Kaufman and Sen, 1994: 239). This may be an effect of the combination of lack of sanitation facilities, unsafe water supplies and the use of intra-uterine-devices (IUD) without proper monitoring. According to UNICEF (1990:p. 162), 39 per cent of currently married women used modern methods of contraception, with the most frequently used method being the IUD (80 per cent). The frequency of gynaecological infection may be correlated with the use of IUD and the nature of women's work in the field. Rice transplanting, a female task, requires women to stand in muddy water during a long period of the day. Gynaecological infection may be also an effect of the lack of proper care in monitoring in rural areas as well as the lack of time for women to devote to their own health.

Currently, there are a total of 2,678 government facilities that dispense family planning services in the country, with most offering IUD and few offering a range of choices (World Bank, 1993: 179), let alone counselling services and monitoring of side-effects of each facility. Family planning in Vietnam is heavily oriented towards demographic objectives with almost no attention given to women's reproductive health (safe contraception, and quality of reproductive care). Rather than emphasizing the quality of services which will give women the confidence to respond to family planning, the current practice newly adopted by the Women's Union, is to tie family planning obligations with credit facilities. This again shifts the burden on women rather than on the state.

On the whole, the interaction between economic reforms at the macro level with the structure of gender relations at the micro level has generated changes that will have serious and adverse long-term impacts on women's education, health and employment.

Changing Women's Positions in the Occupational Structure

Women have always constituted a significant labour force in all economic sectors in Viet-Nam. This was especially true during the three decades of war when women's labour was mobilized to fill the vacuum left by men. Partly due to 'crowding out' after the war, the share of women in total labour force decreased from 53 per cent in 1975 to 51 percent in 1982 (UNESCO, 1989). By 1989, the share of women in the total labour force remained at 51.09 per cent (Vietnam Population Census 1989, Sample Results, 1990), and in 1991 this share declined down to 47.25 per cent (Centre for Women's Studies and UNIFEM, 1994:9). Female wages are found to be lower than male wages, averaging about 70 per cent. The highest range of average monthly wage are found in the following activities by descending order: 1) electricity, gas, water, 2) transport and

communication, 3) wholesale and retail trade and restaurants, 4) manufacturing. The lowest rates are in the two sectors predominated by women, notably agriculture and social services (Living Standard Survey, 1994: 139). Evidence also suggest a considerable discrepancy between urban and rural areas. The average male urban wage is 3.7 times higher than the average of female rural wages. Urban women earn 1.8 times the wage of rural men, and 2.6 time of rural women (UNIFEM, 1994: 18).

Table 2 illustrates the percentage share of women's participation in the labour force in 1989 and 1991. The shift of women's position in the employment structure merit careful examination and must be related to changes in the macro environment as well as to the interaction between macro policy and gender relations at micro level. Before attempting to interpret the reasons for this shift, some notes of caution must be asserted. First, aggregate data are in many ways incomplete. Official statistics by and large omit much of women's unpaid work, i.e. reproductive work and community management. In Viet-Nam as elsewhere, women remain the main agents responsible for these two types of work, regardless of economic change. A recent survey in six communes located in five provinces with different levels of development and rural production systems in Viet-Nam show that women perform 85 to 90 per cent of housework and they are the main caretakers of children with limited male participation (Centre for Women's Studies and UNIFEM, 1994: 55). In addition, with the

Table 2. Labour Force Participation and Percentage Share of Female Labour by Activity in 1989 and 1991 (in million)

Activity	Total 1989	Female%	Total 1991	Female%
Industry	3.36	42.8%	7.39	51.1%
Construction	0.58	27.3%	3.25	31.5%
Agriculture	20.37	53.4%	32.22	49.6%
Forestry	0.09	41.8%	0.08	44.6%
Transport	0.54	14.5%	1.35	17.5%
Communication	0.03	43.3%	0.04	30.6%
Trade, business	1.87	70.5%	3.24	53.0%
Housing, public services, tourism	0.19	49.4%	0.02	52.9%
Science	0.04	36.2%	0.04	34.1%
Education	0.73	66.3%	0.67	61.5%
Arts/Culture	0.05	33.0%	0.02	38.4%
Social services, Health, sports	0.26	64.0%	0.18	64.5%
Government management	0.30	28.4%	0.13	34.3%
Public Finance, Insurance	0.09	52.0%	0.15	41.9%

Sources: Vietnam Population Census, 1989, Sample Results, Table 3.2, Centre for Women's Studies and UNIFEM, 1994:9.

withdrawal of state from the social sector, women have become more active in social and community development through the Women's Union, and through other communal networks (Luong, 1993). Field observations, confirmed by UNIFEM (1994), indicate that much of the social work conducted by VWU for the disadvantaged segments of society (poor female-headed households, homeless women, women in prostitution) falls in the sphere of voluntary work which is undocumented and unpaid or with very low economic incentives²⁶. Second, the quality of statistics in Viet-Nam leaves much to be desired. Much inconsistency is found in different sources. Hence, the statistical representation of women's participation in the labour force must remain subject to debate and improvement.

Bearing in mind these limitations, Table 2 may be interpreted as follows. The agricultural sector absorbs approximately half of the female labour force, with a slight decline from 1989-91. Women are also well represented in industry, trade, public services, and government management. However, although women's predominance in trade is significant, it is not known whether women have managed to shift out of petty trading into wholesale business over time. The initial predominance of women in petty trading in 1989 was stimulated by the reorganization of some 2,000 market places in 1985 with nearly 80 per cent of the market managing members belonging to the VWU, whose cadres combine the education and motivation of small traders with trade management (UNESCO, 1989: 23). By 1991, women were facing increasing competition from men in the control over trade. A survey in rural communities which have diversified their economies since the reform shows that men predominate in large-scale trading and business activities (Centre for Women's Studies and UNIFEM, 1994:16). As trade and business expand, it may be expected that more men will be in control of the more lucrative and less labour intensive trading activities, due to the higher degree of mobility they enjoy. On-going computerization of trade combined with male control over technology²⁷ and finance suggest that men are benefitting and will benefit more from an expansion of industry, trade and communication than women.

As the table shows, female employment in 'formal' industrial activities has increased. Available evidence suggest that women are mainly concentrated in labour intensive activities such as textiles and garment production, and food processing, consumer goods, and handicrafts (Centre for Women's Studies, 1989: 55-57; Vietnam Population Census 1989, Sample Results, 1990: 66). These constitute the fastest growing activities in the economy, in addition to services (World Bank 1994). In services and tourism, women's employment is also growing. So far, no study has been found on women's employment in the tourist sector and affiliated sexual services, although the visibility of women in prostitution is increasing in hotels and related services. No analysis has been made on the nature of power relations in the sex industry, its implications on women workers in restaurants and hotels and the determinants of women's entry to prostitution. Field observations suggest that organized prostitution in Ho Chi Minh City applies similar managerial practices adopted from other Asian NICs. Some of these include: 1) '*Bia Om*' ('*Bia*' means beer and *Om* means *Embrace*) or beer halls where male clients are allowed to 'embrace' female hostesses, 2) '*Karaoke*' bars where individual male clients may choose hostesses who will serve throughout the meal, after which a deal may be concluded on the provision of sexual services. Although wages appear to be higher in prostitution than manufacturing, health hazards and long-term impacts on personal lives are more adverse. As demonstrated elsewhere (Truong, 1990), managerial techniques in disguised prostitution outlets are based on the moral, legal and social stigmatization, and the persecution of

²⁶ For example, according to personal communication by the leadership of the Women's Union of Ho Chi Minh City, the work which involves: a) locating women in prostitution who wish to leave their jobs and b) assistance in training and finding other alternatives, is done by female volunteers motivated mainly by sympathy.

²⁷ According to the Centre for Women's Studies (1990) from 1976 to 1987, male employment in electronics has been 5 times higher than female. It is not indicated whether 'electronics' as a item of classification include the use or production of electronics. But as Viet-Nam has only recently begun to assemble electronics and computers, it may be assumed that this item refers to the use of electronics.

women in prostitution. They control and manipulate women's labour through wage systems, social and physical discipline to remove their identity as workers and to replace it with the identity of a sexual commodity. As the sex business expands in Viet-Nam, it is very likely that such managerial techniques will overtime become institutionalised because they ensure a high rate of profit.

On the whole, the tentative picture of the current shift in the occupational structure may be sketched as follows. Women's position in industries is moving towards the lower paid and more labour intensive activity with less security. In the agricultural sector, women's employment is declining. This statistical decline suggests that either women are moving out of this sector, or that their work is becoming more invisible to statistics. Giving women's limited geographical mobility indicated by the Living Standard Survey of 1993, it may be assumed that women at reproductive age are more tied to the rural sector, and their work is becoming more invisible to statistics. By contrast, more and more younger women may be migrating to urban areas in search for more lucrative work. Patterns of female migration and employment form an area that merit further inquiry to explain the current shift in the structure of the rural labour force, and the recomposition of the female urban labour force. Equally important to explore are the determinants of the shift between different occupations among the female labour force. This will help in the creation of institutional mechanisms to redress processes of their disempowerment in order to enhance their position.

2.2 The Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU): A New Agent in National Development?

Historically, the VWU has been playing a central role in ensuring gender equality before the law. The VWU was founded in 1930 during the struggle for national independence. The organization changed its names and structures several times before becoming the actual VWU in 1976 after the re-unification of the country. The organisation today has about 11 million members (women above 16 years of age), and as such is the largest mass organisation in the country. Its structure consists of four echelons: 1) central, 2) provincial/municipal, 3) district/town/quarter, 4) commune/ward, and is similar to the structure of government administration. The organisation employs about 300 people, two-thirds of whom are in administration and management, and one-third are trainers in the various training centres run by the organisation.

Prior to the reform process, the VWU acted primarily as an agent of the State and the Party to mobilize women to support Party's goals without apparent tension. Since the reform process was initiated, like many other organs of the State, VWU was forced to take more initiatives to serve its constituencies, and to generate funds for its activities. In 1992 at its 7th National Congress, the organisation adopted a new Charter and a new strategy with six main priorities:

- * job creation for poverty alleviation among women
- * women's education
- * health care for women and children
- * strengthening VWU's role in formulation, monitoring and policy implementation related to women and children
- * promotion of gender awareness among policy makers and authorities
- * development of social services to respond to urgent social 'evils' such as prostitution, drug addiction, gambling and domestic violence.

The choice of priorities reflects the organisation's direct response to the immediate needs of its constituencies for whom it must now provide an alternative.

For its part, the Communist Party of Viet-Nam is establishing a new link between women's development and national development, under its guidance. In July 1993, a Resolution of the Political Bureau was issued stating the following:

'One of the objectives of the Vietnamese Revolution has been the emancipation and the overall

development of women, which exerts a direct and lasting impact on the country's development. Therefore, the Party's permanent and most important task throughout all periods of the revolution is to foster women's potentials, to bring them into full play, and to care for their overall development²⁸.

In the same document, the Party also admits its own shortcomings that tend to take women's contribution for granted, while failing to attach due importance to their enhancement and to the creation of more favourable conditions for their empowerment in a new era. The document also refers to its defective policy regarding women cadres and points out that the contingent of women cadres is getting smaller²⁹. In addition, the document also notes with discontent that the prevailing attitude of government officials, which is to treat gender issues as an internal affair of VWU rather than as an integrated issues in development strategy. The document also criticized VWU for failing to come up with a target approach to meet the differentiated needs of women.

However, the document makes no mention to the macro environment as a major problem that undermines the principle of gender equality. It must be noted that although the link between national development and gender equality mirrors the leadership's awareness on the significance of women's productivity, how national development and gender equality are causally related remains by and large unexplored. Hence, structural issues derived from the macro framework of development have not been tackled. It is questionable that VWU has been able to influence the state in the formulation of policies that are responsive to changing gender relations and women's structural position in an era of transition.

At the level of practice, VWU operates in close collaboration with three other national institutions, including: 1) the National Commission for the Advancement of Women founded in 1993 to provide advices to the Prime Minister on legislation, policies and cooperation programmes relevant to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, endorsed by the Vietnamese government in 1984; 2) The Women's Wing of the General Confederation of Labour; 3) The National Council of Female Youth. In addition, VWU also collaborates with several Women's Studies Centres established in the country since the beginning of the 1990s. These horizontal linkages provide the organisation with much political force.

VWU sources of finance come from monthly membership fees³⁰, state budget and other revenues. State budget covers staff salary and some programme activities linked with the national poverty alleviation programme. In addition VWU also receives financial support from bilateral and multilateral sources. In recent years, the organisation also generates its income from its own enterprises. The total budget for 1991-1993 reveals the following proportion: 19.12 percent come from the state, 18.39 per cent from its own income-generating activities, and 62.48 per cent come from external agencies (Interconsult/Sweden, 1994). This shows that the organisation is increasingly gaining financial autonomy from the state, but is developing a more dependent relation with external development agencies. It may be observed that while the financial room provided by the State to the organisation is limited, VWU is charged with more responsibilities in the social sector for which they must raise their own funds.

In many ways, VWU remains one of the most active mass organisation which maintains a firm interest on social issues, and which is most successful in fund-raising for its activities, including the generation of its

²⁸ Communist Party of Viet-Nam Central Committee, Resolution N. 04/NQTW, Hanoi, 12 July 1993.

²⁹ this situation that may be well caused by the decline in women's education and/or their preoccupation with safeguarding their employment in the private sector where wages are higher.

³⁰ The membership fee is 200 Vietnamese Dong (VND). The exchange rate in February 1995 is 10 900 VND per US dollar.

own funds through commercial activities. Its most successful programme has been the job creation programme and the women's training and education programmes. However, its approach and scope of operation suffer from a number of critical weaknesses.

First, the current approach of VWU is a combination of the welfare and the anti-poverty strategy, adding considerable burdens on the organisation's management capacity. In government funded as well as international funded credit programmes for employment generation, VWU has played the role of identification of beneficiaries/borrowers, guarantor to the group of collateral, and collector of payments, i.e. a direct involvement to the whole management cycle. Under the NCPJC, the VWU has to prepare the implementation plan, organize project offices and staff, train them on loan procedures and supervise its implementation. The loan operation itself is carried out by the Treasury with the coordination of VWU, and in some provinces, by the VWU under Treasury control. In addition, the organization also uses the main principle of 'the haves help the have-nots' to build up mutual aid team in agricultural production (seed, technology, labour and sometimes capital). In some localities, women's savings combined with private donations are used to set up scholarship funds for school drop-outs, and other community funds. Thus, although the work of the Women's Union in alleviating the costs of social adjustment for its members has met with some success, this work has been carried out mainly through an intensification of women's work in community management, with limited financial compensation from the state or elsewhere, hence administrative costs of such programmes are sometimes transferred to beneficiaries.

Second, VWU's focus on income-generation activities is based on the assumption that an increase of income will eventually lead to an increase of women's welfare. However, as demonstrated earlier, women's welfare is determined by a wide range of issues related to intra-households relations and cost-sharing of reproductive burdens. There is a need for VWU to find alternative institutional mechanisms that would alleviate women's burdens as reproducers. A neglect of this issue will eventually undermine their role as producers.

Third, regarding social issues such as prostitution and domestic violence, although there is no apparent conflict between the state and the Women's Union, it appears that at least on the issue of prostitution, the male leadership at the central level and the VWU at the local level are taking different approaches. Currently, the leadership adopts a highly moralistic position which defines prostitution as a 'social evil'. Control mechanisms are targeted at women mainly through educational and 'reformatory' measures with harsh punishments³¹. However, interviews in Ho Chi Minh City with VWU staff indicate that although formally the local organisation uses the same terminology which refers to prostitution as a 'social evil', in practice it adopts a more sympathetic approach towards women in prostitution and recognizes the structural determinants of women's entry into prostitution. Formally, the VWU in Ho Chi Minh City is represented in inspection boards of the municipality to control dancing halls and hotels. It also recruits young and sympathetic volunteers who frequent places known employ women in prostitution to locate those who wish to leave their jobs. So far, supportive intervention (e.g. job training and credit) can only be directed at women in prostitution who are accessible to the organization. Although such an approach is laudable compared to the formal position taken by the leadership, it cannot be very effective since it relies primarily on volunteers without support from the state (e.g. finance, training of its programme and staff, or other efforts directed at controlling organized criminals). The VWU is also powerless when it comes to clients' co-responsibility in promoting and maintaining commercialized sex. Thus, unless the organisation can transform the central leadership's perspective on the issue of prostitution in order to jointly formulate a policy towards women in prostitution that recognises forces of patriarchy, gender relations and the effects of economic liberalisation on women's employment, the effects of its work in this area will remain

³¹ Government Report made by Prime Minister Vo van Kiet to the 6th session of the National Assembly, IX legislature, Office of the Prime Minister, 1995. This position treats prostitution as the results of individual mores and preferences conditioned by Western influences as manifested by the recent 'cultural' cleansing campaign to prepare for the Party Congress in June 1996 (*Financial Times*, February 2, 1996, p. 14).

marginal.

Generally, VWU's current view on women's advancement is primarily based on women's access to decision-making and productive resources. Women's participation at the grass-root level in community development should be made more visible and its significance should be enhanced. After all, the state has clearly retreated from the social sector and women are bearing the burdens of maintaining it, at the household level as well as at the level of VWU as an organisation representing women's interests. Activities in the social sector tend to be concentrated on community and family interests, whereas women's interests as reproducers are not systematically tackled. Thus, while the VWU is stretching its institutional capability to the limits to meet the objectives of its policy priorities, it remains far removed from the structural determinants of gender inequality. For VWU to become a catalytic agent of change, it must be able to address the problem of gender inequality at its sources, and to take a pro-active position to prevent adverse effects. It cannot continue to try to solve the problems after their manifestation. To achieve this, gender issues must be placed firmly in the framework of macro-economic policies, rather than being tucked away under social issues.

3. CONCLUSION

With *Doi-Moi*, Viet-Nam's development model has broken the integration between economic and social objectives inherited from the socialist paradigm. A major implication of this separation is the neglect of the systemic link between production relations (regarded as economic) and reproduction relations (regarded as social). While the dismantling of the collective system has been a necessary response to its inefficiency in so far as production is concerned, policy makers did not give sufficient consideration to its efficiency in insuring a network of social services crucial to the reproductive process. Whereas the reproductive strategy of the country in previous periods has benefitted from socialist theoretical guidelines, albeit with their limitations, since *Doi-Moi* was introduced there is a total neglect of the area of reproduction of human resources. This has allowed ad-hoc household-based strategies to emerge without clear possibility of cost-sharing between various institutions. Indirectly, these ad-hoc reproductive strategies contribute to the exacerbation of social disparity, creating diverse patterns of gender inequality for which different solutions must be found.

The legacy of socialism in Viet-Nam has left a level of social consciousness on social equality and gender equality which is to be appreciated. Nevertheless, this legacy has also brought about an approach to equality which is highly vertical, in the sense that each mass organisation is to care for its own constituencies (women, farmers, workers, youth), with insufficient attention paid to the interaction between social variables such as gender, class, age, ethnicity, political affiliation. Hence, processes that generate social inequality based on this interaction are not adequately addressed. Such processes may be expected to be accelerated now that the country's development model is showing signs of an increasing separation between the economic and the social.

The current patterns of streamlining and logic of efficiency reflect a re-alignment of the social, political and economic spheres through a redefinition of gender relations which radically depart from the previous ideological position on female subordination. This re-alignment creates contradictory trends of patriarchal control over women's labour and sexuality. Equally contradictory is the state response to changing gender relations. On the one hand the state declares its commitment to women's empowerment, and on the other hand the state provides limited practical support to, or even punishes, women who have been dis-empowered. Compared to earlier periods, gender-specific policy approaches under *Doi-Moi* have no systematic orientation. They constitute a contradictory patchwork guided by pragmatic interests without sufficient linkages with the macro environment.

In view of the future orientation of its development path which will very likely be based on export-oriented growth (State Planning Committee, 1993), Viet-Nam cannot afford to neglect the dynamics of gender relations and its effects on the female labour force. Export-oriented growth, at least in the initial stage of the

strategy, is heavily based on the use of female labour as experiences of Asian NICs have shown. These experiences have also shown that the patterns of incorporation of women in export-led industries have been characterized by an intensified use of female labour and relatively quick disposal, thus creating a constant and rapid turn over of women workers for whom alternatives must be found. Many studies have demonstrated that the lack of sustainable alternatives has triggered processes of poverty generation and indentureship, which in themselves can lead to other social costs³². Viet-Nam's choice of developmental goals means the country must maintain its competitive edge, or a strong reliance on the female labour force. Conscious efforts must be made to find lasting alternatives to women as producers and reproducers, as they will remain the back bone of national development. This requires a re-examination of the socialist framework on the Women's Question and an adjustment of this framework to be relevant to current realities. After all, it must be recognised that the resilience of women and their communities in the struggle for national liberation was conditioned to a great extent by a policy framework in which the burdens of sustaining human beings were shared. If the state is counting on this resilience for a new national project of development, it should bring the issue of reproductive cost-sharing back on its policy agenda.

Finally, it must be also noted that organized responses to gender bias can be effective in bringing about some changes. Although these changes are limited, they represent a significant step on the basis of which new policy can be formulated. It is therefore important recognize the importance of women's access to the national decision-making machinery. The crucial issue at present is how the Vietnamese Women's Union re-conceptualises the issue of gender inequality, and the extent to which the organisation is capable to come forward with innovative policy instruments which address gender biases at various levels of the society. Furthermore, a state-sponsored universal approach to gender equality and social equality may be ineffective and difficult to operationalised and maintained. Perhaps the time has come for the state to allow more initiatives from society to emerge and to help contribute to an improvement of social relations, a crucial condition for future growth and development.

³² For example, research have shown that indentureship and the inability to meet their family's needs have driven women into prostitution, international trade of sexual slavery, and the mail-order-brides market (Truong, 1986, 1990; del Rosario, 1994).

APPENDIX 1	:	Milestones in Viet-Nam's Reform Process (based on <i>Viet-Nam: A Development Perspective</i> , State Planning Committee, 1993)
1979-85	*	'Output Contract System' introduced, providing farmers greater incentives, and 'Three Plan System' allowing state enterprises to diversify and to market surplus production freely after meeting pre-determined targets.
	*	Import-Export corporations established at various levels.
1986	*	Renovation, or ' <i>Doi-Moi</i> ', formally endorsed.
	*	Introduction of the New Family Code
1987	*	Differences between free market prices and official prices reduced. Ration system abolished for many commodities. Internal trade liberalised.
	*	Enactment of a Foreign Investment Code. This was followed by laws and regulations and establishment of the State Committee for Cooperation and Investment.
1988	*	User rights to land granted to farmers for at least 15 years. They were allowed to make initiatives in farming activities and benefit from surplus production. The previous points system within agricultural cooperatives was abolished.
1989	*	Wide-ranging price reforms. With few exceptions (electricity, housing, medicine), the distinction between official prices and market prices was abolished. Interest rates raised to yield positive real rates.
	*	Devaluation of the official exchange rate close to the market rate.
	*	Trade liberalisation was intensified. Private sector could produce export commodities and trade with foreign partners, import-export quotas were significantly reduced, export subsidies terminated, foreign exchange restriction relaxed.
	*	Fiscal reforms, broadening of the tax base and equal tax rates applied to all economic sectors.
1990	*	Ratification of the Convention of the Right of the Child
	*	National Assembly adopts the Law on Private Business and the Law on Companies, allowing the establishment of private business.
	*	Initial restructuring of State Enterprises; merging or dissolution of loss-making enterprises.
	*	Legal framework for the banking system strengthened.
1990-91	*	Broadening of trade relations due to reduced markets with the former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries.
	*	Promulgation of the Law on Universalisation of Primary Education and Protection and Care of Children.
	*	Socio-Economic Stabilisation and Development Strategy to the Year 2000 approved.
	*	Establishment of foreign exchange centres, utilisation of exchange rates.
	*	Elimination of the practice of increasing money supply to finance budget deficit.
1992	*	Series of decrees concerning the re-organisation of state enterprises, including the provisions for lease, sale, merger, liquidation, and policy towards surplus labour.
	*	Tight fiscal and monetary measures, sharply reducing the rate of inflation; introduction of real positive interest rates.
	*	Adoption of a new Constitution, introducing changes to democratic freedom and property rights, and the right to free business activities in line with the law.
	*	Principles of Agenda 21 endorsed by the Vietnamese Government at UNCED.
1993	*	relicensing of all state enterprises; all forms of subsidised credit to state enterprises effectively terminated.
	*	Continued renovation of fiscal reforms, introducing land user tax with the tax rate

reduced by one half compared to the previous rate; introduction of new wage policy for public and state enterprises workers.

- * Passage of Land law granting farmers flexible land-holding rights over farmland for 20-50 years, depending on use.

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