

ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

The population of Viet Nam in 1999 was 76.4 million, of which more than 50% were in the labor force, most of which is engaged in agriculture and household production in rural areas. Wage workers made up only 39% of the labor force.⁴² Women's economic participation rate declined slightly from 52% to 49% from 1989 to 1999. The participation rate (proportion in the labor force of those aged 15–55 years) of women in 1999 was high at 67% but has also declined from 71% in 1989.

The reasons are complex and may include later entry into the labor force because more girls are students after the age of 15 years; earlier departure from the labor force because women retire earlier (retirement for female waged workers is compulsory at 55 years of age, 5 years earlier than for men); the impact of increased competition in the labor market; discrimination against women; increased well-being; and the social pressure for women to withdraw from the workforce and engage in domestic duties.⁴³ The return of women to domestic duties, and the “glass ceiling,” discriminates against women reaching leadership positions and earning high salaries.⁴⁴ In the past, the advantage of working until 60 years was insignificant because the salary for senior positions was little more than for a junior position. However, this has changed in recent years.⁴⁵

Women form a greater proportion of the labor force in rural areas (49%) than in urban areas (46%). Income-generating opportunities for women in rural areas are greater than in urban areas due to access to household agriculture production and activities associated with agriculture, such as small-scale food processing (e.g., production of noodles, drying fish), handicraft production, trading, and limited seasonal labor. The VLSS98 found that one quarter of urban women were not engaged in income-generating activities. Data from the VLSS93 and VLSS98 show that the proportion of women involved in domestic duties declined, but the censuses of 1989 and 1999 show the opposite. Urban household incomes are on average higher than rural household incomes, so the necessity for women to work may be perceived as less critical in urban areas. This is especially so in a changing social context in which patriarchal tendencies are reemerging and a male's status is elevated if he can support a nonworking wife.

The 1999 Population and Housing Census shows that 39% of the labor force are involved in wage labor and of these 42% are women. According to the VLSS98, which is a smaller sample, 38% of wage employees were women.⁴⁶ Furthermore, between 1993 and 1998, male wage employment in rural areas increased at a faster rate for men (9%) than for women (4%), indicating an increase in seasonal farm laboring. In urban areas, wage employment showed no increase for women during this period, but an increase of 5% for men.

In recent years, the State has become a less significant employer, especially for women. Only 7.3% of economically active women are employed by the State. Women lost jobs in the state sector faster than men and by 1999 only 42% of state employees were women. During the early period of *doi moi*, it is estimated that female labor accounted for about 70% of the loss from the state sector. However, with continued reform of the state sector, it is expected that labor redundancy will be a male problem because most of the remaining overstaffing is of males in

transportation and mining.⁴⁷ In 2000, the Government announced a decision to reduce the public service by 15%. If this decision is implemented, past experience shows that there may be a more detrimental impact on women than on men.

Women total about 51% of nonstate sector employment. However, the women who lost their jobs in the state sector are not the same as those who have joined the nonstate sector. Increased competition in the state sector meant that employees with low skill and low productivity, including many older women, were made redundant or given early retirement, whereas those engaged in the nonstate sector tend to be young and relatively more skilled.

Retrenchments from the state sector also resulted in the movement of women to household duties or self-employment in the informal sector. For some, the informal sector is preferred because the flexibility is more compatible with family responsibilities in spite of the disadvantage of increased insecurity⁴⁸ and fewer fringe benefits than in the state sector. But in the private sector income opportunities are greater with higher salaries and availability of overtime work, particularly in foreign-invested enterprises..

The nonstate sector includes private domestic enterprises, the collective sector, joint ventures, and 100% foreign-invested enterprises. Foreign and domestic capital has created employment opportunities for women both in administration and light manufacturing, such as in textiles, clothing and footwear, and food processing.⁴⁹ Women employees dominate in the foreign-investment sector (72%), the collective sector (54%), and joint ventures (52%).⁵⁰

Although gender divisions in wage labor exist, they are not as rigid as in many other countries. As a consequence, competition exists between male and female workers. The national pattern is that women are overrepresented in education, sales, food processing, accounting, and textile and garment manufacturing, and underrepresented in administration, management, services, skilled manual labor, and unskilled labor.⁵¹ Rural women waged workers concentrate in agriculture, skilled manual labor, unskilled labor, and as educational professionals. Women's labor in rural areas is also used as a tool to overcome hardship. Women are brought into a family through marriage to ease labor shortage. Young girls who leave the rural areas to seek employment in urban areas find unskilled jobs as street vendors, garbage collectors, maids, laborers and in cafes, restaurants, and beer stands. Women in Ho Chi Minh City have been sold to foreigners to ease poverty; children are adopted out for money.⁵² Economic participation does not guarantee empowerment.

In urban areas, both men and women are engaged in skilled manual work. Women are concentrated in occupations of skilled manual workers (e.g., textile and garment workers and construction), professionals in some fields including education, and unskilled workers. Urban men's occupations are more diverse, with a greater concentration of skilled workers in mining, metal works, woodworking, manufacturing, and handicrafts. Even in sectors dominated by women such as education, men hold most senior management positions. Although the seniority of women in both the public sector and state-owned enterprises was notable in 1989, women have become less prominent because of increased competition for senior positions.

Women work about the same number of hours in income-earning activities but earn 14% less than men.⁵³ Nevertheless, during the 1990s the wage gap between men and women

decreased—from 33% in 1993 to 22% in 1998.⁵⁴ The gap between fringe income of men and women also decreased in this period, from 85% to only 23%. However, the wage differential varies over the working life cycle. Wage incomes for female heads of household start to decline once they reach 50 years old, whereas for men it continues to increase during working life. Wage rates are about 31% higher for both women and men in urban than in rural areas, but the wage gap in both areas is remarkably similar.⁵⁵

It is clear that the gender disparity in income stems from levels of qualification (Table 3.1), ability to hold several positions simultaneously, and overtime. Employees may have a substantive position as well as a position in a special “project,” which also contributes income. It is easier for single childless women than for mothers to take advantage of such opportunities. Furthermore, wages in the foreign direct-investment sector tend to be higher than in the domestic sector. Women with children and/or who care for the aged, and older women with few skills or qualifications are the first to leave the wage labor force.

Table 3.1: Qualifications and Real Annual Wage Earnings (‘000 dong/hour) by Sex, 1998

Highest Level of Schooling Completed	Rural Areas		Urban Areas	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
No School	2,641	1,517	5,067	2,856
Less than Primary	2,399	1,775	4,991	3,582
Primary	2,623	2,070	5,495	4,754
Lower Secondary	2,787	2,209	6,434	5,204
Upper Secondary	3,583	3,471	7,887	6,506
Junior College/University	4,913	4,513	13,339	8,477

Source: Desai 2000, Table 4.30.

AGRICULTURE AND NATURAL RESOURCES

According to the 1999 census, women comprise 54% of those engaged in agriculture compared to 60% in 1989. Of the female labor force, 68% (c.f., 58% of male labor) are engaged in the agriculture sector compared to 73% (c.f., 71% of male labor) in 1989.⁵⁶ At the same time returns to women are less than for men for the same work, indicating an increased subsidy to agriculture.

Economic transition has led to fundamental changes in the organization of agriculture production and gender relations within the agriculture community have also been affected. In a context of land shortage, one of the unintended outcomes of land reform has been the increasing fragmentation of household land, which interferes with efficient production. Between 1993 and 1998, the number of male farmers fell by 0.3% annually and the number of female farmers increased by 0.9% annually. During this period, 92% of all new entrants into the agriculture sector have been women, as men move to nonfarm employment.⁵⁷ These changes point to an increasing feminization of agriculture.

Although the declared agriculture incomes for farmers increased by 61% during the 1990s, agriculture income is declining relative to nonfarm income. This implies that women in

general are being left in the less dynamic sectors of the economy. However, they may not be worse off. In fact, female-headed households that receive remittances from absent husbands—although they have a heavier labor burden—are often better off financially than male-headed households that receive no remittances.⁵⁸

It is not clear whether the feminization of agriculture will continue at the current pace. The agriculture sector cannot continue to absorb the 1.2 to 1.4 million new entrants to the labor market each year. Both women and men will be forced to seek nonfarm employment. However, the social constraints on women's movement and their relative lack of vocational and technical skills will disadvantage women in this shift.

Although men and women work about the same number of hours in income-generating activities per year, women work twice as long as men in domestic duties, which means that they work up to 6–8 hours longer than men per day. Such a heavy work burden can affect women's health, especially during pregnancy, and also limits their participation in education, social activities, and community decision making. In many households, social goods and services such as refrigerators, microwave ovens, and washing machines have eased the intensity of women's labor, especially in urban areas. However, in poor rural households, their labor has become more intense, because it is substituted for communally-owned animal and mechanical power.

Decision making on the farm is largely the role of men, even in female-dominated areas such as irrigation.⁵⁹ An interesting finding of the VLSS98 was that in 27% of male headed households, women were found to be the decision makers.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it is men who have access to land, credit, and technical training because they are considered the head of the household (and work shorter hours than women). The longer working hours of women leave them little time for agricultural extension and training courses. For example, even though women do as much of the work in cultivation (50.4% of total work) as men and more of the work in livestock maintenance (61.4% of total work), women comprise only 10% of participants in courses on cultivation and 25% in courses on animal husbandry. Very few agriculture extension officers are women.

The agriculture activities of ethnic minorities differ markedly from those of the Kinh. Many ethnic minority groups are engaged in shifting cultivation and some depend on hunting and gathering for their livelihood. Ethnic minorities are being pushed further into the fragile mountainous environments by the Kinh, who are moving into the uplands due to population pressure in the lowlands and government resettlement programs. Ethnic minority groups with limited access to the market economy resort to selling firewood and timber for building, which contributes to the environmental vulnerability caused by deforestation.⁶¹

SELF-EMPLOYMENT

Those who are economically active usually have more than one occupation and these occupations tend to straddle the state and nonstate sectors in order to optimize job security and income. More than 80% of those who work are self-employed in at least one of their occupations. The proportion is higher for women, with 89% of economically active women being self-employed and 23% wageworkers, which means that about 12% are engaged in both. Most women

are involved in small-scale agricultural production, but increasing numbers are engaged in nonfarm household production. Surprisingly, in urban areas where one would expect wage employment to dominate, three quarters of households derive some income from self-employment.⁶²

Segregation in self-employment exists but, as in other areas, it is not rigid. In nonfarm self-employment, women are more likely to be involved in trading in markets and stalls and on the street, while men are involved in production and services including transportation and construction. An exception to this generalization is that women are overrepresented in garment and textiles manufacture. Most self-employed men and women outside agriculture are involved in the informal sector, but more self-employed men than women are in the formal sector in registered businesses.

Most economically active women live in rural areas, and most self-employed women work in agriculture-related activities in the household. Of all women who worked during 1998, 78% (and 75% of men) were engaged in some form of agriculture-related production as shown in Table 3.2. In agriculture processing, women are involved in mulberry growing and sericulture, baking, and the production of dry rice noodles, dried fruits, herbal tea, sweets, and smoked meat. In manufacturing, they bind books, and produce medicinal vials, leather shoes, school bags, clothing, ceramics and porcelain, embroidery, and woven carpets. In tourism, they operate hotels and restaurants, and sell souvenirs. In the service sector, they are engaged in child and elderly care, home teaching, hairdressing, and as beauticians, tailors, caterers, and in laundries.

Table 3.2: Participation in Agriculture Self-employment Activities by Sex, 1998

Type of Work	Female (% of Total Females Who worked in Last Year)	Male (% of Total Males Who Worked in Last Year)
Cultivation	70.5	68.0
Livestock	61.8	43.7
Aquaculture, Fisheries	8.2	12.0
Forestry	3.9	5.6
Agriculture Processing	2.5	2.1
Agriculture Product Selling	6.9	2.1
Any Type of Agriculture Self-Employment	77.6	74.8

Source: Desai 2000, Table 4.15.

Of those who are self-employed and run businesses, men predominate. Where women employ others, they tend to employ fewer workers than men because women are mainly involved in small-scale trading. Even when operating outside trading, women still tend to employ fewer people than their male counterparts and run less profitable enterprises than men. Women's enterprises are undercapitalized due to lack of skill, time, resources, and credit.⁶³

One of the major changes to private enterprise in the past few years is the introduction of the enterprise law, which makes it easier to register a business. Almost 20,000 have been

registered in the past two years. The gender impact of the new enterprise law is difficult to ascertain because the data, which include costs and income of businesses, are confidential.

Women's ability to diversify into nonfarm activities has stronger and more consistent implications for the well-being of rural households. Households that are confined to farming and have diversified only into wage employment are systematically poorer than the rest. This finding suggests that a strategy to maximize opportunities for female nonfarm activities through access to credit, skill, and productive resources—especially for poor families—would contribute to greater well-being of these households.⁶⁴

ACCESS TO CREDIT

Viet Nam's economic transition to a market economy has created greater financing needs for both men and women. A number of lending channels exist in both the formal and informal sectors (Table 3.3). Formal institutions include the Viet Nam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (VBARD), Viet Nam Bank for the Poor, People's Credit Fund, and informal funds of moneylenders, traders, and relatives (revolving credit funds). Women tend to borrow from informal sources where interest rates are higher and funds are limited, whereas men more commonly borrow from government banks (Table 3.3). The VLSS98 shows that women hold 41% of all loans but only 29% of loans from official sources.⁶⁵ Access to credit is particularly difficult for the poor and for poor women in particular. Analysis of why women tend to borrow from informal sources is not conclusive. However, it is related to the limitation of one loan per family from formal sources, generally in the name of a male; impediments in the application process; and women's lack of skill and confidence in larger-scale entrepreneurial activities.

Women's borrowing tends to be for small loans. The VWU manages a revolving credit scheme of dong (D) 4,000 billion and makes low-interest loans available to women. Women borrow small amounts to buy chickens, piglets, and rice seed (D300,000–800,000). Access to VWU funds is seen more as a charity than for enterprise development and the credit is often tied to acceptance of other programs managed by them such as contraception, enrollment in adult literacy programs, nutrition programs, information exchange, and agriculture extension.⁶⁶ Repayment occurs in more than 90% of cases, because the VWU has the capacity to apply social pressure through its regular meetings.

The VBARD is another source of formal credit for women. Of the 4 million farmers who borrow from this bank each year, only 10% are women. Collateral is not required for loans of less than D5 million, but in practice staff require a property list and collateral trust from the chairperson of the commune's people's committee. If the borrower defaults, funds are taken from the commune budget. Female heads of household may experience more difficulty securing a loan if they are not influential in the commune. Divorced and separated women may experience opposition due to the social stigma. The People's Credit Fund also offers loans without collateral, but the interest is higher and the term is shorter than for VBARD. The Viet Nam Bank for the Poor is operated through VBARD but does not target women.

Table 3.3: Source of Loans by Sex and Relationship of Borrower to Household Head (%)

	Private Money Lender	Relative	Other Individual	Bank for the Poor	Other Govt. Banks	Programs	Other Sources	Total	No. Loans	Percent of All Loans
Sex and Relationship to Household Head										
Male Head	8.6	22.2	16.4	7.9	33.9	5.8	5.1	100.0	2,636	59.3
Female Head	11.1	21.4	24.4	8.9	22.8	6.7	4.7	100.0	822	1,704.0
Male Spouse	4.8	25.1	26.6	9.5	23.0	0.0	11.1	100.0	97	2.1
Female Spouse	12.3	34.3	20.7	4.7	13.2	9.3	5.5	100.0	722	15.9
Other Male	6.9	33.9	19.6	4.4	28.3	2.7	4.2	100.0	147	3.2
Other Female	9.4	15.6	39.5	5.6	18.0	1.7	10.3	100.0	102	2.1
Sex of Household Head										
Male	9.2	25.0	17.5	7.2	29.4	6.4	5.3	100.0	347	77.7
Female with Spouse										
Female without Spouse	6.4	23.3	26.9	10.7	21.9	5.2	5.6	100.0	4	8.7
	13.3	20.5	24.9	6.7	23.4	5.8	5.5	100.0	6	13.7
Sex of Borrower										
Male	8.4	22.9	16.9	7.8	33.3	5.5	5.3	100.0	2,880	64.6
Female	11.6	26.8	23.7	6.8	18.2	7.6	5.4	100.0	1,646	35.4
Total	9.5	24.3	19.3	7.4	27.9	6.2	5.3	100.0	4,526	100.0

Source: Desai 2000

It is clear that women have less access to credit than men, but the impact on gender or household well-being is not clear.⁶⁷ Because most adults are part of male-headed households or have adult men within female-headed households, these households are probably not disadvantaged regarding access to credit. Income is usually shared within the household; thus, the gender impact of differential access to credit is minimized. Furthermore, a household can only have one loan at a time and each loan requires a second signature as legal inheritor, which is usually the wife; again, the impact on the household is minimized.

Problems arise where income is not pooled or there is no adult male to negotiate a loan. Income may not be pooled where the husband is a seasonal migrant, a gambler, an addict, or withholds money. A female who heads a household may not be able to secure a loan because of her gender. These examples underline the necessity for policies to formalize gender equity.

POVERTY AND GENDER

There is no doubt that poverty declined in Viet Nam during the 1990s. This is measured in terms of increasing expenditures per capita and improving social indicators and is also reflected in the perception of poor households that their well-being has improved. The depth of poverty across the country diminished during the 1990s, yet remains significant (Table 3.4). The proportion of households below the poverty line decreased from 58% in 1993 to 37% in 1998. However, these gains are fragile. Many individuals are clustered just above the poverty line and can slip back into poverty through personal tragedy, ill health, or natural disasters.⁶⁸

Poverty in its broad sense is not limited to low income and consumption but includes lack of access to services such as education and health care, and other nonmaterial dimensions such as insecurity, powerlessness, and social exclusion. In this sense, a large proportion of the poor in Viet Nam are women—health and education indicators for women are worse than for men, wage differentials exist, and women are underrepresented in the formal labor market. An additional dimension is that the gender gap appears to be more acute within poor households.

Although poverty has been reduced, inequity has increased slightly, as seen by the rise in the Gini coefficient from 0.33 in 1993 to 0.35 in 1998, which reflects the different pace of economic growth in rural and urban areas. Incomes in rural areas grew by 30% whereas urban incomes grew by 61% during this period. Most poverty occurs in rural areas (45% of the rural population and 90% of the poor) with much lower incidence in urban areas (10% of the urban population). The rural poor are at greater risk because they are more vulnerable to shocks caused by natural disasters and ill health. Most of them are in the agriculture sector. In 1998, 79% of the

Table 3.4: Depth of Poverty by Region, 1993 and 1998

Region	Poverty Gap Index*	
	1993	1998
Northern Uplands	26.8	16.8
Red River Delta	18.8	5.7
North Central	24.7	11.8
Central Coast	16.8	10.6
Central Highlands	26.3	19.1
Southeast	9.2	1.3
Mekong Delta	13.5	8.1
All Viet Nam	18.5	9.5

* The Poverty Gap Index measures the depth of poverty, i.e., how far households are below the poverty line compared to the nation as a whole.

Source: World Bank estimates based on VLSS93 and VLSS98 (in Government-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 1999, 16).

country's poor but only 61% of the population were employed in agriculture.⁶⁹ Poverty is associated with small farmers who engage in subsistence agriculture and nonfarm activities that have low productivity because these people lack skills, credit, and infrastructure services.

Poverty is unevenly spread across the country. Poor communities are generally located in rural areas and are concentrated in the remote and mountainous areas of the Central Highlands, Northern Uplands, and North Central regions (Table 3.5). The regions that contribute to the greatest number of poor are the Northern Uplands, the Mekong (Red River) Delta, and the Northern Central region. Poor areas usually coincide with a concentration of ethnic minorities.

Table 3.5: Regional Concentration of Poverty in Viet Nam, 1993 and 1998

Region	Contribution to Total Poverty		Share of Population (%) 1998	Population (million) 1998
	1993	1998		
Northern Uplands	21	28	18	13.5
Red River Delta	23	15	20	14.9
North Central	16	18	14	10.5
Central Coast	10	10	11	8.1
Central Highlands	4	5	4	2.8
Southeast	7	3	13	9.7
All Viet Nam	100	100	100	75.8

Source: World Bank estimates based on VLSS93 and VLSS98 (in Government-Donor-NGO Poverty Working Group 1999, 17).

Three quarters of all ethnic minorities live in poverty and ethnic minority women are the most disadvantaged of this group. Only 31% of the Kinh and Chinese are poor. The particular problems of ethnic minority women include very heavy workloads, limited decision-making power within the households with respect to expenditure and reproduction, high levels of domestic violence, and low access to education and knowledge.⁷⁰

Gender disparity also appears in national-level statistics within particular sectors and these disparities are magnified within poor households. For example, in education, inequity exists for girls in upper secondary, vocational and technical, and university education. Disparity also exists in hours worked (including in the home) and income received. As a consequence, as incomes in agriculture have declined relative to other sectors, the sector has become increasingly feminized.

National-level indicators often disguise the wider gender gap in poorer households. For example, national statistics show that primary school enrollment rates reached 92% for boys and 91% for girls in 1998 (see Table 2.2). However, major differences appear when enrollment data are disaggregated by income quintile, ethnic group, and region (see Table 2.3).

The gender gap is also disguised when the household is used as the unit of analysis. Comparisons are commonly made between the well-being of male- and female-headed households as if this represents gender disparities. A gender gap may also appear within

households, especially poor households, where gender inequality is reflected in the difficult decisions over the distribution of scarce resources. In poorer households, women have a marked lower nutritional status than men and the gap is increasing incrementally, even at a national level.⁷¹

National statistics indicate that female-headed households are no worse off than male-headed households and in some cases they may fare much better. However, households in which women are divorced, separated, or widowed, with no adult children at home and who do not receive remittances, are often poor and have a higher incidence of landlessness. In 4 poor provinces, 6–19% of households had little land or were landless and most of these were female-headed households.⁷² By comparison, female-headed households with resident adult males or that receive remittances may be better off than male-headed households that do not receive remittances.

Girls in poorer households are less likely than boys to be sent to school because of the anticipated differential rates of return on investment that are often reinforced in remote areas by social restrictions on female mobility as documented in the Lao Cai Participatory Poverty Assessment.⁷³ For example, in Thai Giang San village, only 20% of eligible children attended school and of those, girls made up only one third. In poor households, food insecurity was the single greatest reason for children's nonattendance at school. Children and especially girls often stay at home or follow their mothers to help in the field. Rates of return on investment in girls' education are seen as low, especially among the Hmong and Han, where girls are viewed as belonging to their future husband's family. The Kinh, Dao, and Nung invest equally in the education of boys and girls, because they believe that their daughters will continue to support them even after they marry.

The same study found that female illiteracy is correlated with remoteness, ethnicity, and poverty. Illiteracy of both men and women is high among ethnic minority households and in most villages it is highest in poor households, where literacy of women is almost nonexistent. In Lai Chai, a remote Phu La ethnic group village, 43% of all households had literate men whereas only 11% had literate women. Of those households defined as poor, 21% had literate males and only 4% had literate females. Levels of literacy among females in remote areas are also lower than for their counterparts in the midlands.

Women in remote areas are doubly disadvantaged in terms of knowledge and education. They lack both formal and informal opportunities to acquire knowledge. This disadvantage is important not only from a social equity point of view but also because women have prime responsibility for childcare and family nutrition and health; thus, investing in women's education contributes to the household's well-being. Women cannot participate in formal education because of the heavy workloads. The lack of electricity also prevents women from benefiting from labor-saving machinery in threshing rice and grinding corn. Women rarely travel outside the village, thus limiting their informal knowledge.

A focus on poverty alleviation, especially among ethnic minority groups, will improve the position of women in the longer term. However, it may not affect their status relative to men in the shorter term or contribute to their empowerment. Relevant education in the vernacular, and access to clean water, power, and transport to markets will directly benefit women. Cultural

impediments to change within the ethnic communities as well as among the Kinh decision makers often block initiatives that could result in greater gender equity. Institutional support for education, health, and political representation is absent from many poor communities.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

Political Representation and Electoral Process

There is no formal barrier to women's participation in the electoral process and at some levels, women's participation is higher than in neighboring countries (Table 3.6). Representation of women is higher in elected rather than selected positions, suggesting that the community has more confidence in women than in the VCP. It may also indicate that elected positions are less sought after because of their more limited power.

People can stand for election to the People's Council at the commune, district, and provincial levels. From the successful candidates, members of the National Assembly are elected. In contrast, people are selected to VCP committees including the Politburo, the Central Committee and the Control Council. The executive committees of the VCP are more powerful than the National Assembly; they develop resolutions and other official decrees to be adopted by the National Assembly. Therefore, women's participation and influence in these committees are crucial.

Table 3.6: Women in Parliament in Asia, 1997

Country	Women Parliament Members (%)
Viet Nam	26
People's Republic of China	20
Philippines	11
Lao PDR	9
Cambodia	6
Thailand	6

Source: VWU 1997 cited in NCFW 2000, 53.

There has been a strong legislative commitment to women's rights in positions of leadership and decision making. Politburo Resolution 04-ND/TW July 1993 declared that there should be an increase in the number of women in positions of authority in all sectors within VCP committees and the Government. However, this resolution has failed to increase the political representation of women in selection-based committees.

Participation at the Local Level

The number of women elected in the People's Council at the commune, district, and provincial level increased in both 1994 and 1999 (Table 3.7), but remains lower than the proportion of women elected to the National Assembly (Table 3.8). Representation of women in the commune people's committees, which are selected positions, is low and has actually decreased. The proportion of female presidents of people's committees at these levels is also low but increased in the latest election. There is a higher turnover of women than men at this level; thus, the experience of women is not accumulated and their training is not for the long term. The low formal representation of women in local committees hampers their involvement in decision-making processes.

Although there is less political representation in people's committees at the local level, women are active at the grass roots through mass organizations such as the VWU and the Farmer's Union. Women are better represented as leaders in these organizations, occupying 70% of president and vice-president positions from commune to central levels (Table 3.9).

Table 3.7: Women in People's Councils at all Levels (%)

Session	Provincial	District	Commune
1985–1989	29	19	20
1989–1994	12	12	13
1994–1999	20	18	14
1999–2002	22	20	17

Source: National Assembly Office.

Table 3.8 Women in the National Assembly (%)

Term	%
1971–1976	32
1976–1981	27
1981–1986	22
1986–1992	18
1992–1997	19
1997–2002	26

Source: National Assembly Office.

Table 3.9: Women Leaders in Social Organizations (%)

Position	Central	Provincial	District	Commune
President	17	32	57	32
Vice-President	64	42	32	35
Presidency Member	35	43	42	36
Executives	28	42	36	41

Source: Documents of the 7th National Congress of Women's Unions, cited in Phan Thi Thanh 2001, 39.

Participation at the National Level

The proportion of women in elected rather than selected positions increased during 1990s. In 1994, the VCP Central Committee issued Directive 37, which was designed to increase women's participation in political leadership (20% of elected positions should be filled by women). Within the 1997–2002 National Assembly, 26% of members were women, an increase of 8% from the previous term (Table 3.8) and much higher than neighboring countries (see Table 3.6). However, participation of women does not equate to gender-sensitive decision making. Without training to increase their confidence, women's participation may contribute little to ensuring policies are gender sensitive.

In important decision-making committees, women's representation has declined. Until recently, there was one female member of the Politburo, and the Vice President of State and the Vice Chair of the National Assembly were both women. After the Party Congress in 2001, there were no women in the Politburo. The proportion of women in the Central Committee declined slightly but increased in the Control Commission (Table 3.10).

About one tenth of party committee members at the central, provincial, district, and commune level are women. They participate in the social rather than strategic committees including the Committee for Education, Youth, and Children (41%), the Ethnic Council (40%), and the Committee for Social Affairs

(32%), with less representation in the committees for Foreign Affairs (16%), Science and Technology (11%), and Economics and Budget (3%).⁷⁴

Cabinet and Public Service

The proportion of women in leadership positions within the government administration is still very low and falls short of the First Plan of Action targets, with women occupying about 10% of senior positions⁷⁵ (Table 3.11). At the ministerial level, only the Minister of Ministry for Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), and the head of the Committee for Protection and

Care of Children and the National Committee for Population and Family Planning are women. There are no women ministers in major portfolios, such as Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Ministry of Education and Training, and Ministry of Justice. Women's participation at senior administrative levels remained low during the 1990s.

Table 3.10: Women Representatives in the VCP Central Committee (%)

	Central Committee	Politburo	Control Commission
1996–2001	10.6	5.3	14.3
2001–2006	8.7	-	22.2

Table 3.11: Women in Key Administrative Positions, 1994 and 1997 (%)

Position	1994	1997
Minister	10	11
Vice-Minister	7	7
Department Head	13	12
Department Deputy Head	9	13

Source: National Women's Congress 1994, 1997.