

NATIONAL PLANS

Relevant government planning documents include:

- (i) National Socioeconomic Development Strategy to 2010; and
- (ii) Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Programs and the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy.

The Socioeconomic Development Strategy to 2010 adopted at the 9th Party Congress held in April 2001 is to accelerate industrialization and modernization along socialist lines so that Viet Nam can become an industrialized nation by 2020. This will be achieved through various mechanisms including the creation of nonfarm employment in rural areas, especially in agribusiness and biotechnology; the promotion of labor-intensive industries for export; the development of an IT industry; and the development of infrastructure, the service sector, and a network of urban centers. The strategy is to maintain the central role of the State in the economy but also to encourage collective and private ownership. It is accepted that the required investment will come from private savings because government savings and foreign direct investment are not expected to increase in the medium term.

It is of concern that gender issues are not prominent in the Socioeconomic Development Strategy. The Strategy neither highlights the potential for women's contribution to development nor presents safeguards to minimize negative impact on women. Several unsuccessful representations were made to the drafting committee by NCFAW including a comprehensive gender analysis of Strategy recommendations, which showed male bias in the new areas of focus on industrial development.

The Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy proposes a three-pronged approach: creating the economic environment and maintaining macroeconomic stability to promote growth; narrowing the gap between regions, and realizing gender equity and the advancement of women; and developing social safety nets for the poor and victims of natural disasters.

The section in the Strategy on gender equality prescribes a number of actions to ensure that women "can carry out their responsibilities and participate fully on an equal basis in all activities, especially in political, economic, cultural and social activities in the industrialization and modernization process." Apart from equal access to the workforce, the Strategy includes measures for equal access to education, health care and family planning services, and to relieve domestic workloads. Also included is the need for awareness campaigns to pursue these goals.

NATIONAL GENDER STRATEGY AND PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN 2001-2005 (POA2)

The National Gender Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women 2001-2005 (POA2) is the most important gender-specific strategic planning document. It superseded the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women 2005 (POA1). POA2 was drafted by NCFAW following wide consultation and research,⁷⁶ and was approved by the Government in Decision No. 19/2002/QD-TTg of 21 January 2002. It outlines 6 objectives and activities in the areas of employment and economic status for women, education and training, health, leadership and decision-making, women's rights, and strengthening the national machinery (Table A3.1). As an outcome of the POA2, all sectoral departments will be required to prepare gender strategies and plans of action for implementation.⁷⁷

NATIONAL WOMEN'S MACHINERY

National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW)

The Government established NCFAW in 1993 to promote women's status and enhance their role in nation building. NCFAW officially represented the Government at the Beijing World Conference on Women in 1995. The National Committee for the Women's Decade formed in 1985 in response to the International Decade for Women and the Nairobi Women's Conference preceded this committee. NCFAW has 16 members, who are from organizations such as the VWU and youth and peasant unions, and various government ministries. The President of NCFAW is also President of the VWU and the two Vice-Presidents come from the Ministry of Education and Training and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, respectively. The day-to-day work at the national level is carried out by a standing committee consisting of six people from the VWU, two from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and one each from the Ministry of Finance and Office of Government (Figure A1.1). This committee is externally funded by UNDP, Government of the Netherlands, and other bilateral donors, and assisted by foreign consultants.

NCFAW has become responsible for coordinating implementation of the country's response to the International Platform for Action for Women and the Beijing Declaration signed by the Government in 1996. The first National Action Plan for the Advancement of Vietnamese Women by the Year 2000 was signed by the Prime Minister in October 1997. This Plan has been revised by the government-donor-NGO gender working group and submitted to the Prime Minister. Part of this process was the preparation of a comprehensive situational analysis of four key areas of women's concerns: health and safety, education and training, leadership and decision making, and employment and economic issues.⁷⁸

In 2000, NCFAW prepared the National Strategy for the Advancement of Women 2001–2005 in line with the Beijing Platform for Action for Women. Under this strategy and through a parallel committee structure set up in 1994, committees for the advancement of women (CAWs) were established at the provincial level and within all line ministries and government committees. Every ministry, branch, and people's committee is required to develop an action plan, which sets out in concrete terms measures to implement the National Plan.

Theoretically, NCFAW is supported by the CFAW network. However, the linkages are not clear. The membership of each CFAW is prescribed by position. Usually members are deputy directors; there may be 18 persons on a part-time basis. This means that members may not have expertise or interest in gender-related policy matters. Furthermore, they do not receive separate funding for their activities (e.g., calling meetings or drafting proposals for requests for training or for ministry-specific plans of action) and consider themselves inadequately resourced.

In MARD, a technical working group (TWG), directly funded by more than 70 donors, assists the CFAW. It was set up in 1999 as a pilot project to assist the development of a sector-specific action plan. The TWG focuses on macro issues (e.g., policy and research, human resource development, and the development of technical guidelines on gender integration into MARD activities), capacity building (e.g., a handbook for rural households and a gender-sensitive curriculum for agriculture extension).

NCFAW has developed a second phase of their project. The overall objective of the second phase is to strengthen the capacity of the national machinery and, using POA2 as the policy instrument, to mainstream gender throughout the other government plans and programs, such as the Socioeconomic Development Strategy and Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy. This may require:

- (i) training within each ministry;
- (ii) leadership training for women candidates for the National Assembly election scheduled for mid-2002 as well as to work with the Fatherland Front to develop more gender-sensitive pre-election procedures;
- (iii) strengthening gender sensitivity of policymakers by integrating a gender perspective into curricula of key political training institutions, such as the Ho Chi Minh National Academy for Political Science; and
- (iv) developing a gender-sensitive database in order to monitor impact and progress through the General Statistics Office (GSO) gender analysis of the multipurpose household surveys.

Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU)

The VWU is a mass organization of the Fatherland Front established in 1930, with more than 11 million members at present (50% of all women aged over 18 years) (Figure A1.2). Its origins were to mobilize women politically in the struggle for independence.

The VWU operates at 4 levels: commune, district, provincial, and national. Every 5 years a National Women's Congress is held at which delegates are elected on the basis of proportional representation. A 15-member presidium oversees the day-to-day operations of the VWU at the central level. Membership requires payment of a fee and participation in community events. This by definition excludes some sections of the population, such as the poor and ethnic minority women who may not speak Vietnamese. As a result, the VWU is not necessarily representative of these groups.

In 1988, Government Decree No 163 instructed all levels of government to consult the VWU on issues concerning women and children, thus giving the VWU a central role. For some, the interpretation of consultation has been extended to include implementation. The result is that since *doi moi* and the inflow of international donor contributions, the role of the VWU has been diverted from one of political mobilization, advocacy, and grassroots activism, to implementation of a wide variety of projects, such as microcredit and microenterprise development schemes, mother and child health and family planning, literacy, agriculture extension, and domestic violence.

International agencies have cooperated with the VWU in implementing these projects because of its reach as a mass organization. However, the implementation of gender-specific programs by the VWU works against the principles of mainstreaming. For example, with microcredit lending, the VWU plays two roles: it provides contact with formal credit channels (e.g., VBARD and the Viet Nam Bank for the Poor) and directs small-scale lending. It is argued by some that the role of the VWU should be to act as an advocate and intermediary for women at the commune level in order to secure loans from formal lending institutions rather than to act as a lending agency whose role is unsustainable.

Strategically, the head of the VWU is also the head of NCFAW. Nevertheless, the linkages between the two institutions should be stronger in order to capitalize on the grassroots capacity of the VWU and the policy-advice role of NCFAW. Both would benefit from stronger linkages with CFAWs within the ministries. Curiously, the VWU was represented at the Beijing World Conference on Women as Viet Nam's main nongovernment organization (NGO).

OTHER GENDER-RELATED ORGANIZATIONS

Apart from the VWU and NCFAW, there are more than 15 government-funded and Vietnamese NGOs directly concerned with gender issues. Among the international community at least 17 international agencies, 10 bilateral donors, and 15 NGOs have gender-related activities (Tables A2.1, A2.2, A2.3, and A2.4). The potential for duplication is enormous. However, this has been mitigated to some extent by the government-donor-NGO gender working group, which meets regularly to share ideas and experiences. To document their various activities, the group produced a joint government-donor strategy that contains a useful matrix specifying how the activities of each body fit with priorities identified in POA2 (Table A3.1).

There are at least two substantial resource libraries on gender: NCFAW Gender Resource Center, which has an extensive collection of gender training materials developed specifically for Viet Nam; and the Center of Family and Women's Studies, which also has an extensive collection of research materials and reports.