

Economic growth is good for gender equity in the long run but growth alone does not ensure improvement. Growth that brings gender equality may be slow and uneven. Interventions are necessary in order to minimize long-term disparities as well as short-term risks and shocks. There are important roles for governments, the community, and international donors in (i) removal of discriminatory systemic elements embodied in laws, institutions, market structures, and technology; and (ii) promoting equitable access to and appropriate design of basic services to help households improve their productivity.

Levels of assistance to women can be grouped into three levels, which can be seen as building blocks:

- (i) benefits to women (e.g., of a women's health clinic);
- (ii) improved equity in access (e.g., to education, credit, and entrepreneurial skills training); and
- (iii) empowerment (e.g., a recognized voice in public decision making, family planning, and household expenditure).

Directing benefits to women is perhaps the easiest form of intervention, but the benefits are often undermined by the pooling of benefits within the household, flexibility in the gender division of labor, and reallocation of resources within the household.⁷⁹ Many of the early WID policy recommendations were based on this approach. One cannot have empowerment without benefits to women or equity in access. The approach can be one of targeting and/or mainstreaming. Debate still surrounds these approaches, although mainstreaming is more popular approach.

Improved equity in access and empowerment require a sensitive planning approach. They require changes of existing systems and power structures and may meet with resistance from entrenched male interests. The strategies for improved access and empowerment are based on the principle of mainstreaming, which is fundamental to the GAD approach. Unless there are checks firmly in place within the political system, a reliance solely on mainstreaming as a gender intervention tool may result in the disappearance of gender issues from the agenda

GOVERNMENT PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

The Government is committed to meeting the requirements set out in POA2 and is using this as the major planning instrument for gender. NCFAW has been charged with responsibility to coordinate the efforts of both government and donors. Ideally, POA2 will be integrated into the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy, as well as the Government's sector-specific strategies dealing with economic management, rural development, human development, and governance and public administration reform.

NCFAW is coordinating the development of the joint government-donor gender framework, which documents activities of major donors and how they support the POA2; identifies how projects in the pipeline could address the POA2; identifies gaps for further activity (Table A3.1); prevents duplication; and promotes sharing of best practices and lessons learned. For example, the government-donor-NGO gender working group supports the decentralization of project management, which is an increasing orientation of donors. The group has found that this trend, unless carefully monitored, can cause difficulties because women's political representation at the local level is usually less than at the central level.

Although government legislation and policy in the area of gender are strong, a gap is apparent between policy/legislation and implementation because of lack of resources, skills, and time, as well as the reemergence of patriarchal attitudes as the State withdraws from micromanagement of social activities. As noted earlier, implementation of legislation appears to vary according to the personal commitment of the officials involved, and women often face unofficial discrimination.

Although the Government has directed all gender-specific projects to the VWU, some small projects have been implemented by other ministries (e.g., MOLISA's project on trafficking of women and export of labor). Reliance on the VWU to take charge of all gender issues places undue pressure on the VWU. Although the VWU is resourceful, its levels of skill and capacity are inadequate to cover all gender issues at all levels.

OTHER DONOR AND NGO PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Most international donors in Viet Nam are committed to supporting gender concerns and have gender equity as a crosscutting strategy. They have moved away from a WID to a GAD approach. This is reflected in a shift of focus from women's projects to mainstreaming gender concerns into all projects⁸⁰ (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: Examples of Gender-specific Donor Projects

Donor	Project
UNDP, Netherlands	Ongoing support to NCFAW
Government of the Netherlands	Mainstreaming gender in the National Institute for Public Affairs and Ho Chi Minh National Political Academy
United Nations Fund for Women	Combating domestic violence against women in Viet Nam.
Canadian International Development Agency	Gender in public spending, Ministry of finance.
Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations/UNDP	Gender analysis of VLSS98.
United Nations Industrial Development Organization	Food processing in the Central Region.
Swedish International Development Agency	Funding training for women in MARD; developed a gender assessment tool.

Source: NCFAW 2001.

In addition, there are some regional projects, which also contribute to POA2. These include a project conducted by the United Nations Fund for Women which focuses on statistics, politics, and technology. UNDP has an interagency project addressing issues of cross-border trafficking in women and children in the Mekong Subregion.

Other donors are keen to support gender-specific activities directly, but their interventions tend to be small and short term. For these interventions to be effective, there is a critical need for coordination, which is currently provided by NCFAW. As a consequence, many donors that contribute to gender-specific activities also support NCFAW, including ADB, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Oxfam Great Britain, Royal Netherlands Embassy (RNE), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), UNDP, United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), and World Bank (WB).

NGOs have been very active in the area of GAD in Viet Nam for many years. Their projects are usually small and targeted and often better suited than larger projects for dealing with such sensitive issues as gender-based violence. Their activities are numerous, diverse, and widespread. Some of those active in gender issues are listed in Table A2.4.