Gender Differences in the Transitional Economy of Viet Nam

Ha Noi, August 2002

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Key Gender Findings:
Second Viet Nam Living Standards Survey, 1997-98

August 2002

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

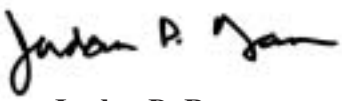
Women's rights and gender equality are embedded in many of Viet Nam's government policies, including its constitution. The Government of Viet Nam has put in place various institutional mechanisms to implement gender equality policies, such as the National Committee for the Advancement of Women. The recent decision of the Prime Minister approving a Strategy for the Advancement of Women to the year 2010 demonstrates the Government's ongoing commitment to the long-term process of achieving gender equality. Nevertheless, persisting traditional practices and attitudes prevent Vietnamese women from enjoying equal rights. At times implementation barriers impede progress in achieving gender equality.

Hence, it is important, on a regular basis to assess gender differences in various aspects of socio-economic life, in order to create more appropriate policies to target specific areas where gender inequality exists. The main purpose of research that forms the basis for this report is to assess the current situation of gender differences in the transitional economy of Viet Nam. The report explores the gender differences in key sectors of development and attempts to define broad policy directions. The research findings show that important gender equality achievements have been made and in some areas, the situation of women or girls is actually better than for men or boys. However, there remain many areas where women and girls are still at a disadvantage compared to men or boys. Continued targeted efforts are required to sustain as well as further improve the situation of women and girls in Viet Nam.

Collection of sex-disaggregated data and a subsequent gender analysis of the data will continue to be a prerequisite for sound gender-sensitive policy-making. These efforts are also essential for providing factual indication of real gaps in terms of where women and men have gained or lost in the process of development. Over the last few years, Viet Nam has progressed well in data collection. This year, the General Statistics Office has launched a new Household Living Standard Survey which will be carried out every two years. Preliminary data of this year's survey will be available at the end of 2002 thus allowing for a new gender analysis in 2003. This will be timely to adjust the implementation of the Government's Action plans, including the Strategy for the Advancement of Women as well as the Plan of Action II. These data will also provide crucial information to measure progress made towards reaching the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 as well as the Viet Nam Development Goals which form part of Government Strategies, such as the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS). In the future, it will also be important to complement quantitative surveys with qualitative surveys and to learn more about decision making and resource allocation patterns within the households throughout Viet Nam.

Both FAO and UNDP trust that this report will contribute to the on-going debates and discussions on integration of gender considerations in Viet Nam's development policies and programmes and stand ready to support the Government in facing this challenge as well as in future gender analysis activities.

Jean-François Ghyoot
FAO Representative



Jordan D. Ryan
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Glossary and Abbreviations

BCG	Vaccination to prevent Tuberculosis
Body Mass Index (BMI)	Measure of adult nutritional status calculated by taking the weight (kg) over the height (m) squared.
Chronic energy deficiency	Assessment of adult nutritional status measured by the Body Mass Index.
CPRGS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
Doi moi	Viet Nam's reform programme that led to major changes in modes of production, government institutions and provision of social services and significant improvements in living standards during the 1990s.
DPT	Vaccination to prevent Diphtheria, Pertussis and Tetanus
FHH	Female-headed household. In this analysis headship is self-reported by households as an administrative requirement for implementing the survey and may not represent true decision-making power within a household.
Gender	The social roles of males and females defined in a particular society which may change over time
Gender equality	Equal outcomes for men and women, often used as a proxy to assess gender equity
Gender equity	Fairness to both men and women. This is hard to quantify and is usually measured by measures identifying equal outcomes rather than true equity between sexes
Housework	Household chores such as cooking, cleaning, household repair, etc. Does not directly produce income, but being critical to daily life it may be viewed as "facilitating" the generation of income.
Intra-household allocation	The allocation of resources and benefits among members of a household
IUD	Intra-uterine device (contraceptive method)
Living conditions	The environment in which individuals/households perform their functions as members of the society including basic necessities for survival (food, shelter, health, education)
Living levels	See living standards
Living standards	The extent to which a person, family or group of people can satisfy their material wants
MHH	Male-headed household

Poverty	Poverty is a scarcity of resources needed for a human being to survive in a specific society governed with specific norms and practices
Purchasing power	A measure of the ability to purchase goods or services, usually calculated as per capita household expenditures and often used as a measure of poverty
Real wages	Wages after adjustment for inflation
Sex	The biological characteristics of being male or female
Stunting	A measure of long-term child malnutrition, measured by taking height for a given age and comparing to the height for a given age among a "standard" well-nourished population of the same age
VLSS	Viet Nam Living Standard Survey
Vulnerability	The condition of not being able to adjust to changes that occur in the environment

(US$1=15,180 VND)

Gender Differences in the Transitional Economy of Viet Nam

Key Gender Findings: Second Viet Nam Living Standards Survey, 1997-98

1. Introduction

Gender equality is an important development goal of Viet Nam's political establishment.

In Viet Nam, an essential government policy focus is on improving the status of women. President Ho Chi Minh, the founder of modern Viet Nam, exhorted his countrymen to discard "historical" *prejudices* and *injustices* against women. In 1946, the country's first constitution enshrined gender equality in the broadest of terms. Since then the political establishment has repeatedly affirmed gender equality as a central development goal including the recent Decision of the Prime Minister (19/2002/QD-TTg) approving the National Strategy for the advancement of women in Viet Nam to the year 2010. In Viet Nam, the constitutional and official view of gender equality in principle is quite broad and is sought both in the workplace and at home.

On-going monitoring of gender equality should be an important part of policy-making.

In all countries, it is important that monitoring and evaluating progress towards gender equality is an on-going part of overall policy analysis and policy-making.

A review of the existing conditions of gender differences can guide gender responsive policy interventions.

Therefore, even though the Government and Communist Party of Viet Nam are committed to build an egalitarian social order it is still necessary to analyse the current differences between men and women, girls and boys. This situational analysis should highlight gender differences that reflect discriminatory individual choices and attempt to assess the extent to which they are the result of gender-biased incentives in the economy and social norms and values regarding gender roles. A review of the existing conditions of gender differences allows an assessment of the limited effectiveness of existing policies and consideration of the need for alternative policy interventions to correct continuing gender imbalances.

1.1. Technical issues

This report synthesises results from two detailed analytical reports on gender in Viet Nam.

The report is a synthesis of findings from two reports analysing data from the second Viet Nam Living Standards Survey conducted in 1997-98 (VLSS II).

The first report entitled **Viet Nam through the lens of gender: Five years later** by J. Desai is a statistical analysis of gender differences in the social and economic spheres using data from VLSS II. On occasion comparison is made with the situation in 1992-93 as reflected in VLSS I.

The second report, entitled **Living conditions of women in Viet Nam (1997-98)** by E. Barrios is a multivariate analysis of VLSS II data for the variable determinants of living conditions and poverty.

There are a few technical and data constraints that should be taken into consideration when interpreting results of this gender analysis.

Interpreting the findings of these reports in a meaningful way requires paying attention to several points. First, the sample of households interviewed in survey sample does slightly under-represent households headed by very young adults, and has an older age distribution than the population. For this reason some caution is warranted, especially when interpreting change between 1992-93 and 1997-98.

Second, while the VLSS does provide individual level information on education, health, nutrition and employment, it does not provide information on individual level consumption, control over income or individual asset ownership, which are necessary to analyse intra-household allocation of resources. Nevertheless, this report makes use of the VLSS data significantly to look at differences between individual men and women, boys and girls, and in other cases between households and enterprises headed by men and women.

Third, in order to appreciate the foundation of gender inequality, it is necessary to pay close attention to household characteristics such as household composition and internal household interactions. In Viet Nam, almost all individuals live in households with other individuals, in which there is some sharing of individual resources and income. This is viewed as "intra-household" allocation of resources. Well-being of men and women depends greatly on how intra-household resource allocation decisions are made, how asset ownership is defined and how much control individuals have over jointly produced income. The VLSS data alone are not sufficient to fully analyse these intra-household allocations but nevertheless provide important insights.

1.2. Structure of report

Section 2 examines the definitions and types of households and the association of gender and the household head to general poverty indicators. Section 3 examines gender differences in means of income generation and work time allocations. Section 4 examines the social sectors of education, nutrition, health and use of health care. Section 5 examines the inter-relationships of the economic and social spheres in determining gender inequalities in living standards. Section 6 presents recommendations for a broad gender-responsive policy framework. The final section concludes the report.

2. Household Structure, Living Standards Incomes and Savings

2.1. Household Structure

Sex of household head is used as a proxy for assessing decision-making within a household.

The identification of one person as the head of the household is an administrative requirement in Viet Nam. The oldest individual in the household is usually designated the head. Typically, the identified head is male. VLSS data is recorded at the household level (as opposed to the individual level). Therefore, the focus is on the sex of the head of the household in assessing the gender differences in household living standards.

Nuclear households are the norm.

The typical Vietnamese household is nuclear, consisting of one male adult, his wife, and two or three of their children. Nuclear households make up 71 percent of all households. Non-nuclear households are primarily those with three generations, including one of the couple's parents and/or grandchildren. The co-residence of adult siblings is rare.

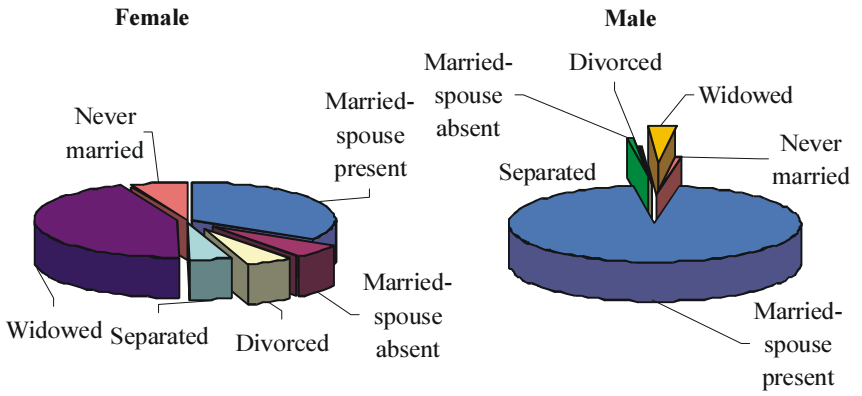
Women marry around the age of 21 and they tend to marry men two to three years older than themselves. While the formation of a new household may be initiated by marriage, it is often not until after children are born that a new independent household is created, separate from the grandparents. Eventually however, by their mid to late 30s, most men are considered household heads of their nuclear households. Sometimes, adult couples continue to reside with one set of their parents, and the title of household head is passed onto the younger male, the adult son. Amongst men aged 65 and over, approximately 20 percent are identified within the household as the new household head's father. This has implications for household labour and income supplies, particularly as women more often move away from their own family household into their husband's household. This situation may be seen to provide greater advantage to those who have sons, who are less likely to shift their labour and income earning power away from the household.

Female headed households (FHHs) make up 26 percent of all households.

Approximately one quarter (26 percent) of all households in Viet Nam is considered female-headed households (FHH)(17 percent in rural areas and 37 percent in urban areas). The designated male-headed household (MHH) is the norm, a pattern consistent with traditional family structures and views on gender roles, and their perceived relative economic importance. Female-headed households are female headed typically by default. While 96 percent of male household heads are married and have their spouse living with them, two thirds (67 percent) of female household heads do not have their spouse present in the household. Widowed women make up the majority of all female household heads (44 percent), while almost 7 percent of female household heads are currently married with their husbands residing elsewhere.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of marital status for MHH and FHH. MHHs overwhelmingly include a spouse, whereas FHHs typically do not.

Figure 1: Marital Status of Household Head, 1997-98



One third of all FHHs have a spouse present.

This leaves one third (33 percent) of female headed households with the male partner present in the home, suggesting that classification in terms of either male or female headed is arbitrary, and may not capture the diversity of ways in which family members identify within the household. It is evident that nuclear households that identify as female-headed are disproportionately urban and relatively, financially better off. While in male-headed households there is no difference between the hours spent in paid work by the head and his wife, in female-headed households with a spouse present the woman typically works much longer hours than her husband does. This suggests that households which designate women as household heads may be different in a systematic way from households designating a man as household head, and that the classification itself has much to do with paid work patterns.

2.2. Living Standard Differences between Male and Female Headed Households

FHHs in general have higher expenditure based living standards than male-headed households (MHHs).

Female-headed households typically are more mature households. They have older adults and fewer young children, therefore smaller household size. They are also disproportionately urban, where living standards are considerably higher than in rural areas. FHHs therefore, may be considered to exhibit a higher standard of living than MHHs, when measured by living standards indicators such as per capita expenditures (purchasing power), poverty incidence and caloric intake. However, this is only apparent as determined on a relatively short-term model of poverty, measuring consumption expenditures of households over a 12-month period. When assets, capacity to borrow and labour resources are also considered, FHHs

in fact emerge as more vulnerable to the shocks that lead to declines in living standards long term.

FHHs without a spouse present have lower living standards.

The differences in living standards between FHHs and MHHs are also less substantial when compared separately in both rural and urban areas. The gap is smaller also for FHHs headed by women who are widowed or separated and/or divorced. While these households are still considered to exhibit higher standards of living than MHHs, the gap is reduced.

There exists is a great difference in living standards between FHHs with a spouse present, and those with no spouse present. FHHs with a spouse present in the household have distinctly higher living standards. The presence of an additional earning male contributes greatly to living standards of households. FHHs with no spouse present possess fewer labour resources and are therefore substantially more vulnerable to income shocks.

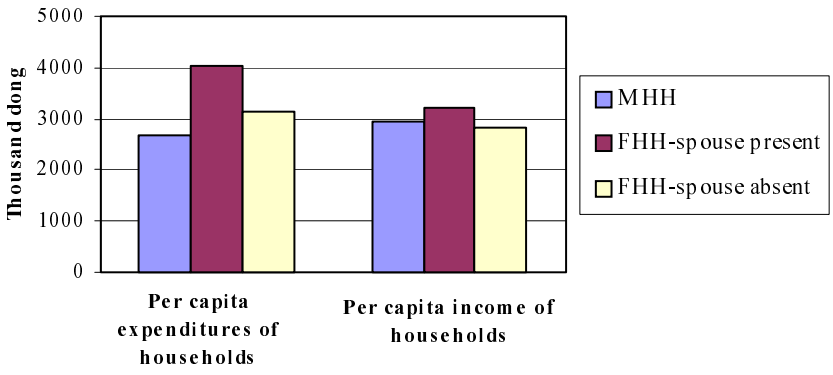
2.3. Gender Differences in Incomes and Expenditures

Household income has been calculated as the sum of income from crop production, livestock maintenance, aquaculture, non-farm self-employed enterprises, wage employment, remittances and other sources.

Purchasing power of FHHs is greater than of MHHs.

Figure 2 shows per capita expenditures and per capita income for MHHs and FHHs. Expenditure may be viewed as a reflection of the purchasing power of the household, and implies access to attributes that provide for a desirable living conditions. Although income of MHHs and FHHs are similar on average, the purchasing power of FHHs is much greater. This may point to the efficiency of FHHs in the allocation of scarce resources or might be due to additional sources of income, e.g. through remittances by husbands.

Figure 2: Per Capita Expenditures and Per Capita Income for MHHs and FHHs, 1997-98



FHHs with no spouse present depend on remittance incomes.

Incomes are highest when both spouses are present in the household and households have multiple sources of income. FHHs without the head's spouse in the household have fewer income sources. As consumption is not dependent entirely on current earned income, consumption differences need not be consistent with income differences. Households with a male or female adult absent tend to receive remittances (unearned income), which also contribute to the incidence of FHHs without a spouse exhibiting a higher standard of living than MHHs. This is particularly the case in rural areas, where there is no difference in per capita incomes between MHHs and FHHs without a spouse. In urban areas, remittance incomes are not as common, and so urban FHHs with no spouse present have less per-capita income than those headed by males.

2.4. Gender Differences in Savings and Borrowing

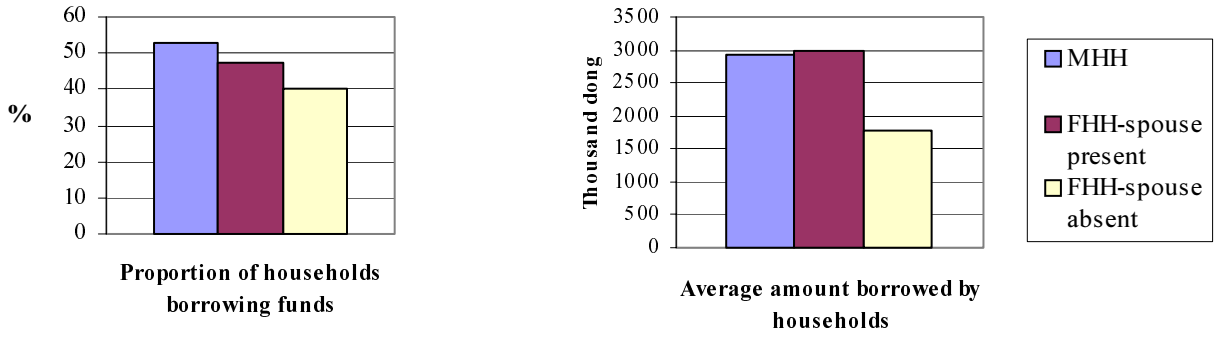
In urban areas the savings of FHHs are less than those of MHHs.

The relationship between expenditures, savings and credit reflects the efficiency of the household in functioning as a small enterprise. A typical Vietnamese household has approximately 7.1 Million Dongs in savings and liquid assets (including cash, bank accounts, precious metals and jewellery). FHHs on average have slightly higher levels of savings than MHHs both in terms of savings per household as well as per household member. In urban areas, however, FHHs have less savings than MHHs. While there is no significant difference between FHH and MHH in total household savings, they do differ significantly in terms of savings per capita. FHH have a total savings of 3.6 Million Dong in urban areas and 1 Million Dong in rural areas, whereas MHH have 4.9 Million Dong in urban and 0.7 Million Dong in rural areas.

FHHs borrow less overall and have less access to formal credit sources.

Almost one-half of all households borrow funds, though FHHs are less likely to borrow funds than MHHs. Figure 3 shows the proportion of all households borrowing, and the average amount borrowed, by sex of the household head.

Figure 3: Proportion of FHHs and MHHs Borrowing and Average Amount Borrowed, 1997-98



All households with a spouse (or one primary income) absent are much less likely to borrow funds, and also tend to borrow significantly smaller amounts. As FHHs have a far greater proportion of spouses absent, this discrepancy impacts disproportionately on them. Two-thirds of all funds borrowers are male, though information suggests that most loans are intended for the needs of the entire household, rather than those of specific individuals.

One-third of all loans is obtained from banks, yet women are far less likely to access banks, than men are. A 33 percent of all loans accessed by men are obtained from government banks (other than the Bank for the Poor). Only 18 percent of loans accessed by women are obtained from these banks. The most common sources of loans for women are informal, relying on private lenders such as relatives (27 percent of all loans) and other individuals (24 percent of all loans). Women also make use of the Bank for the Poor at a rate slightly less than that of men.

Women's use of private money lenders involves higher interest rates, and also reflects a lack of collateral-based lending on their part. While 41 percent of loans accessed by men are those requiring collateral, only 27 percent of women's loans are of this nature. This pattern is apparent even when the woman borrowing is designated the household head. This restricted access to credit limits the opportunity of FHHs to develop into small scale entrepreneurs.

FHHs with no spouse present pay higher interest rates on loans.

The household's asset base is an important factor in accessing credit. FHHs with no spouse present face particular disadvantages in asset accumulation, and typically access credit requiring higher rates of interest than both MHHs and FHHs with a spouse present. The greater asset base of households with both spouses present and their ability to draw on multiple income sources makes these households less vulnerable to economic downturns than households with only one spouse present in the household, households which are overwhelmingly female headed.

3. Work and Income Generation

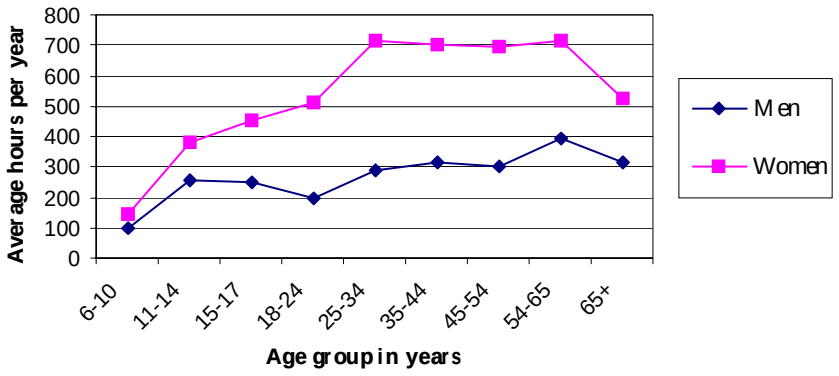
3.1. Labour Supply of Women and Men

Women spend twice as much time on unpaid housework as men.

Men and women record similar amounts of hours spent in income-generating work. However, women spend almost twice as much time as men undertaking housework, completing household chores for which they are not remunerated. As a result, women consistently work significantly more hours than men at each point in the life cycle. Their leisure hours therefore are substantially less than those of men. Between the ages of 25-64 years, a woman spends on average, 13.6 hours a week in housework, compared to a man who contributes 6 hours a week to household chores. Within the youngest and oldest age groups the difference persists, but is considerably less.

Figure 4 shows the difference between hours spent by men and women on housework, for which they are not remunerated, at each age group over one year.

Figure 4: Men's and Women's Average Hours Spent in Housework, 1997-98



Women and men are both working more hours in paid work.

Paid work patterns altered significantly over the five year period 1992-93 to 1997-98. All adults recorded an increase in paid working hours on average, yet this increase was substantially greater for women than for men. The greatest increase recorded by women was by those aged 25-34 (up 19 percent), while men of this age recorded an increase of only 9 percent. Women recorded an increase in working hours less than men in one age group only, that of 55-64.

Children are working fewer hours.

The work hours of children of school age declined over this period. This decline ranged from a 67 percent decrease in younger ages to a 25 percent decrease in older ages. This pattern corresponds to the increase in school

enrolment observed over the same time period. The decline in the work hours of school-age girls was consistently less than that of boys, except for those in the 6-10 year age group.

The greater increase in women's hours spent on income generation compared to men over this period means women have contributed more to economic growth than men. In addition, when housework is considered this contribution is even more significant.

There is a gendered division of labour in urban areas.

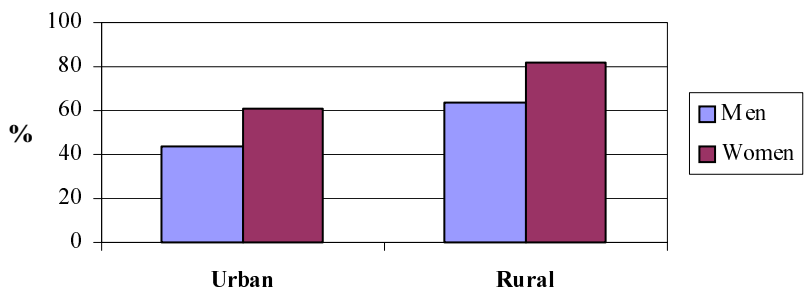
The variety of skilled occupations found in urban areas reflects a gendered division of labour. In rural areas however, over 80 percent of jobs are in agriculture. Here there are few occupational gender differences, as occupational choice in general is relatively small. In urban areas, women are most commonly engaged in sales, in local markets and stalls, on the streets or in stores. Men are more likely to be employed in skilled occupations such as mining, metal work, woodworking, manufacturing, and handicrafts. Women's employment in skilled occupations is limited to the textile and garment sector and construction. Agricultural cultivation, e.g. the raising of livestock, plays an important role in urban employment for both women and men.

Self-employment is the predominant form of employment for both men and women.

Self-employment remains the predominant form of employment in Viet Nam. More than 80 percent of those who work are self-employed in at least one of the two or three jobs they hold during a year. Over 90 percent of all households derive some income from self-employment, and even in urban areas, three quarters of all households derive some income from self-employment activities. In rural areas the primary source of self-employment is small-scale agricultural production based on family labour, and oriented predominantly towards meeting household food needs. In urban areas the primary source of self- employment is non-farm household enterprises.

Figure 5 shows the proportion of working adults engaged in self-employment in their primary job, by sex and residence. A far greater proportion of women relies on self-employment than men, in both rural and urban residence.

Figure 5: Proportion of Employed Men and Women (aged 18-64) Engaged in Self-employment in Primary Job, by Residence, 1997-98

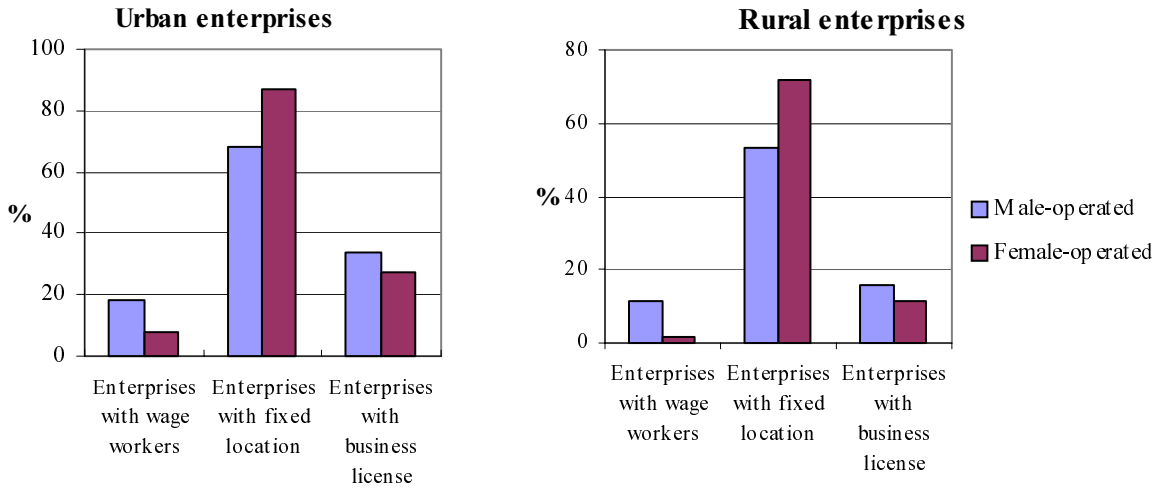


3.2. Gender Differences in Non-Farm Enterprises

Female-operated enterprises tend to be concentrated in the sales and services sector, male-operated, in production.

Non-farm enterprises operated by women differ distinctly from those operated by men. In both rural and urban areas, women are much more likely to be engaged in retail sales, to operate hotels and restaurants and to produce textiles and garments. Men mainly run enterprises producing or processing goods (other than textiles). Figure 6 shows the characteristics of male and female owned non-farm enterprises by location, based on 1997-98 data. Enterprises operated by women typically employ fewer individuals. They are also less likely to have a business license than those operated by men, in both rural and urban locations. As women's businesses are predominantly involved in sales, they tend to have a fixed location.

Figure 6: Characteristics of Male and Female Operated Non-Farm Enterprises by Location, 1997-98



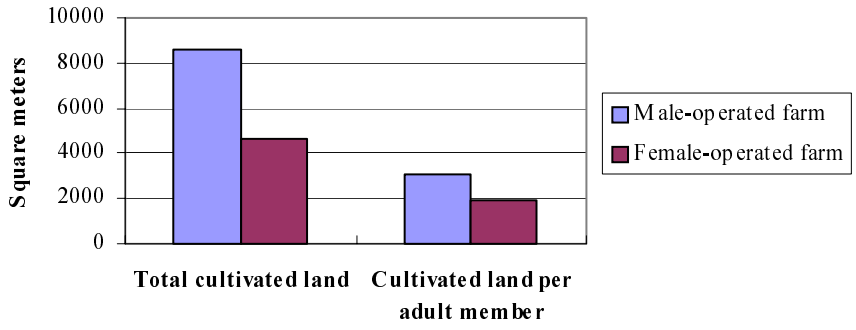
These differences suggest that women's businesses are of a smaller scale than operations run by men. Typically, median revenues and profits of female-operated enterprises are lower than male-operated enterprises. This is the case in all sectors except for the services sector, in which enterprises run by women record higher median revenues and profits in urban locations.

3.3. Gender Differences in Farming

Female-operated farms have lower land areas to cultivate.

The average Vietnamese farm cultivates 7,024 square meters of land. However, female-operated farms cultivate only 54 percent of the land area cultivated by male-operated farms. Figure 7 shows the gender differences in land cultivation. It depicts total land area cultivated, as well as the amount of land cultivated per adult household member, by farm operator's sex.

Figure 7: Total Land Area Cultivated and Land Area Cultivated per Adult Household Member, by Male or Female Farm Operator, 1997-98



Lower profits among female-operated farms are primarily the result of lower amounts of land cultivated.

Female-operated farms not only cultivate less land area than male-operated farms; they also cultivate less land per adult household member (61 percent of the per-adult land area of male-operated farms). While some of the difference in land area cultivated may be explained by differences in adult labour resources available in the household, this discrepancy in access to land per household member is unexplained. Limited access to agricultural land implies less diversified economic activities in agriculture, with important negative consequences for food security and agricultural development.

Even though female operated farms tend to have less labour resources (due to the high number of single women heading FHHs), and cultivate less land, they tend to cultivate land more intensively than male-operated farms, when measured in terms of household labour hours per hectare. Farm profits of female-operated farms, however are only 62 percent of those of male-operated ones. There is no statistically significant difference in farm profits per hectare of land cultivated and per-hour of family labour used. Lower profits are the result primarily of lower amounts of land cultivated.

Livestock maintenance is the most female-dominated income-generating activity in agriculture.

In rural areas almost 84% of households raise some type of animal. As an income generating activity, and as a means to accumulate assets that reduce vulnerability, livestock raising activities are a significant part of a rural household's income portfolio. Women contribute on average 71% of a household's livestock maintenance resources. It is undoubtedly the most female-oriented income-generating activity in agricultural enterprises. In primary school ages, livestock maintenance is the main income-earning activity of children of both sexes. As they mature and gain physical strength, the share of labour time spent on livestock maintenance drops, more for men than for women. Women aged between 25 and 55 spend almost 30 percent of their total labour effort in agricultural self-employment on livestock maintenance, compared to 20 percent for men.

3.4. Women and Men in Waged Work

The proportion of women in wage work is only about half the proportion of men.

The increasingly gendered nature of waged work is an important consideration in living standards analysis. Waged work tends to reflect independent control over income allocation, in that other household members cannot easily appropriate wages through a reallocation of resources. The proportion of women engaged in waged work is just over half that of men. The proportion of all adults in waged employment increased from 26 to 32 percent in the five- year period 1992-93 to 1997-98. However, the increase was substantially greater for men than for women. The proportion of all women engaged in waged employment increased only 4 percentage points (from 19 to 23 percent) with almost all of this increase occurring in rural areas, and no change evident in urban areas. For men the increase was 9 percentage points (from 32 to 41 percent), increasing in both rural and urban areas (though the increase in rural areas was considerably more substantial than in urban areas).

Women's wages are lower than men's, even within the same sector.

A real wage gap persists between men and women. The real average hourly wage women receive (2,266 dong) is only 78 percent of the hourly wage earned by men (2,900 dong). Women receive lower wages for the same type of work as men. For example, in agricultural work, which constitutes 42 percent of all waged jobs in rural areas, women's hourly wage is only 73 percent of men's. Women are also concentrated in lower skilled professions such as teachers and manual workers, and are less likely than men to be found in senior management positions. Real wage rates are about 31 percent higher for both men and women in urban areas, and the wage gap in rural and urban areas is remarkably similar. In all sectors, across all locations, men report higher average wages than women, except in the administration sector within rural locations.

Figure 8 shows average hourly wages for men and women, by education and residence. At every level of educational attainment, women receive lower wages than men. This gender gap is most stark at the college/university level.

Women's education does not provide equal advantages in the labour market.

Women's human capital is allocated far less efficiently between different types of occupations, than men's. Figure 9 shows the occupational distribution of all men and women with upper secondary, and higher education, based on 1997-98 data. Women are concentrated overwhelmingly in teaching professions, while men exhibit a far more balanced participation in various occupations.

In rural areas, women are much more likely to work as farm labourers than men with the same level of educational attainment. The seasonal nature of farm labour leads to low and unstable earnings, which affects women predominantly. The urban labour market offers more diverse employment

Figure 8: Men's and Women's Average Hourly Wage by Education Level, and Residence, 1997-98

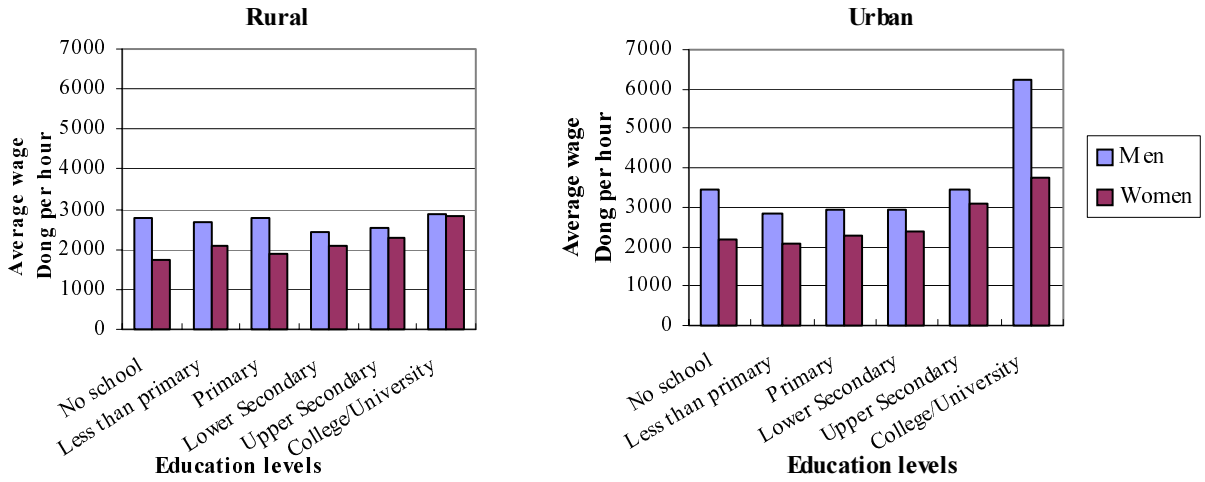
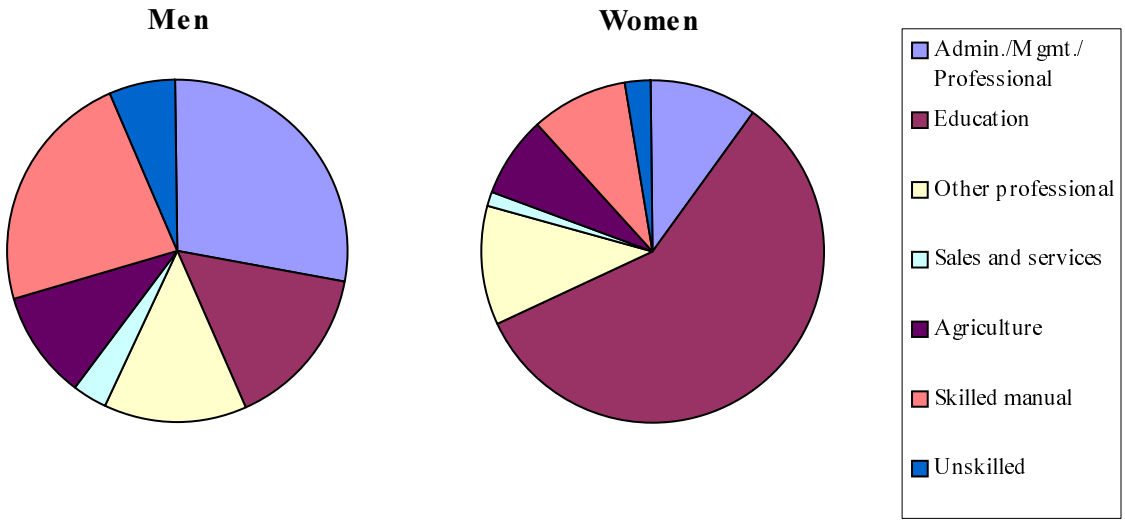


Figure 9: Occupational Distribution of Employed Men and Women with Upper Secondary and Higher Education, 1997-98



options and women with higher level of education have a wider range of occupational choices. Yet, relative to men of similar education, women still feature much less in administrative and senior management positions, and are much more frequently employed in teaching professions.

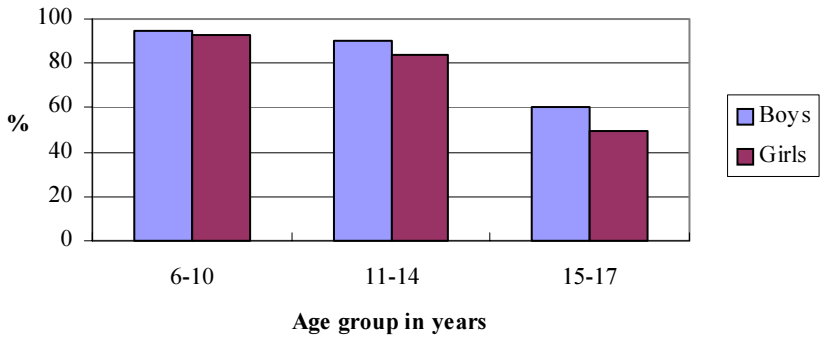
4. Education, Health and Nutrition

4.1. Gender Differences in Education

The gender gap in primary education is minimal.

Total enrolments of school aged children increased in the five year period 1992-93 to 1997-98, resulting in 94 percent of primary school aged children enrolled in school. Children are starting school earlier and staying in school longer, and the gap between girls' and boys' enrolment has declined. Figure 10 shows enrolment rates of girls and boys at different ages, based on 1997-98 data. There now exists very little difference between the enrolment rates of boys and girls of primary school age. However, a significant gender gap is still apparent in the secondary school age group, which increases in the upper secondary school level.

Figure 10: School Enrolment Rates of Boys and Girls by Age Group, 1997-98



Girls in urban areas are more likely to attend school than those in rural areas.

The gender gap in education may be measured by the difference between the proportion of girls and boys enrolled in school. On average, the gap has declined over the five-year period from an 11 percentage point difference to a 6 percentage point difference in lower secondary school ages. In upper secondary school ages the gap has declined from a 15 percentage point difference to an 11 percentage point difference. However, among children of ethnic minority and within the poorest segment of society, there has been very little change. The educational gender gap has actually widened for children of parents with no education. For girls, school attendance is lower in rural areas compared to urban areas. For boys, school attendance is similar across both areas. This implies that boys attend school regardless of residence, whereas, girls in rural areas are more likely not to attend school.

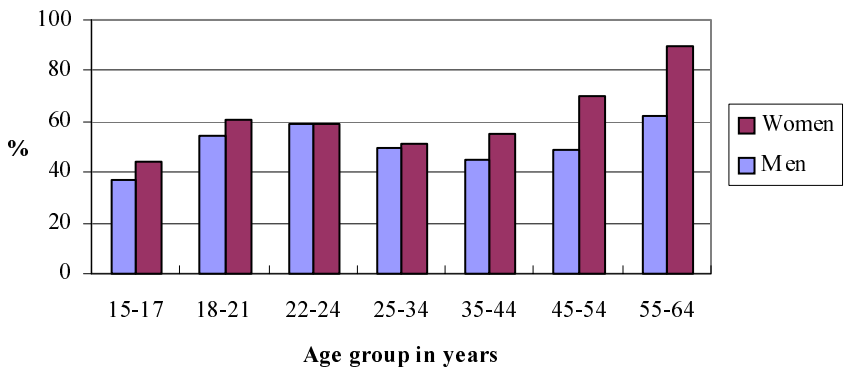
The general increase in primary school enrolment is due in part to a trend toward early and on-time start of grade one. However, data on grade

progression shows that a large percentage, ranging from between 45 and 75 percent, of children, are behind their target grade, that is, the grade in which they should be for their age. More girls are on target (60%) than boys (54%). Although girls perform better than boys and are more likely to be on target than boys, it is boys who are more likely to continue schooling beyond lower secondary school.

A gender gap in education beyond primary level is re-emerging.

A disappointing feature of current patterns of educational enrolment and completion is the re-emergence of a gender gap in adult levels of education. Figure 11 shows the proportion of men and women who have completed no more than primary education. It shows that although the gender gap in the share of men and women with primary education has disappeared between those aged 22-24 years, it has re-emerged between those aged 18-21 and 15-17 years, where 6 to 7 percent fewer women than men have advanced beyond primary education. This discrepancy represents a significant efficiency loss to the educational system in general, as girls tend to perform better in school than boys in maintaining their target grades.

Figure 11: Proportion of Men and Women with No More Than Primary Education, by Age Group, 1997-98



4.2. Gender Differences in Nutritional Status

Women are less well nourished than men.

Both adult men and women reported improvements in their nutritional status between 1992-93 and 1997-98, with the improvement being greatest among men. Adult women are still more likely to suffer from chronic energy deficiency than men. The gender gap in adult nutritional status is greatest in rural areas, in poorer households and amongst people of ethnic minority. This suggests that in the most disadvantaged households, women have access to relatively fewer resources than men.

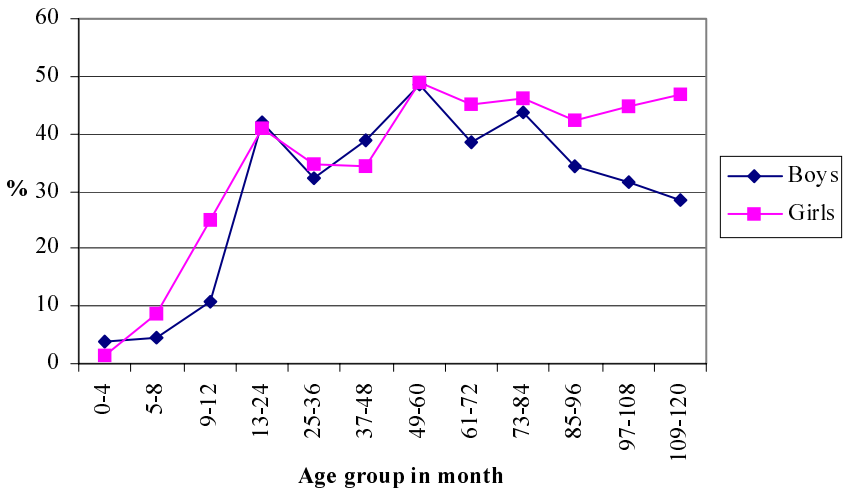
Recent improvements in child nutrition have benefited boys more than girls

There has been a significant improvement in children's long-term nutritional status over the five-year period. Long-term nutritional status is measured by indicators of stunting (diminished height for age). The proportion of children 10 years of age and younger who exhibit signs of stunting has declined from around 50 percent to 38 percent over this period. However, the improvement was greater for boys than for girls. Forty one percent of all girls under 10 years of age still exhibit signs of stunting, compared to 35 percent of boys. On average, there is no statistically significant gender difference in short-term nutritional status, identified by incidence of wasting of children (diminished weight for age). However, girls in rural areas exhibit significantly higher levels of wasting than girls in urban areas.

There is some evidence that boys are better nourished than girls.

Figure 12 shows rates of stunting across age groups, for children up until the age of 10. There is little statistically significant difference in stunting recorded between girls and boys younger than 5 years of age. However, among children 5 to 10 years of age, girls exhibit rates of stunting significantly higher than those of boys.

Figure 12: Moderate to Severe Stunting in Boys and Girls by Age Group, 1997-98



4.3. Gender Differences in Health and Use of Health Care

Women report illness more than men.

Rates of reported illness are significantly higher among women than among men. Within a four-week reference period, 44 percent of women aged 18-55 reported illness, compared to 35 percent of men of the same age. Although women report greater incidence of illness than men, they typically return to work sooner than men when having been ill. Both women and men report greater frequency and length of illness in rural areas than in urban areas.

Age is an important contributing factor to illness. Both men and women over the age of 55 reported high incidence of illness; 70 percent of women and 60 percent of men.

Women make use of health services more than men.

Among adults aged 18-55 years, utilisation of health services by women (40 percent of women) is considerably higher than utilisation by men (30 percent of men). Age is again an important factor, with 64 percent of women and 52 percent of men over the age of 55 having consulted a health care practitioner in the four-week period. The higher use of health services by women does not reflect greater use of any one particular type of health service. Approximately three-quarters of both men and women treat themselves with the purchase of medicines from pharmacies without prescriptions.

Young boys have illness reported more often than young girls.

Illness rates of boys younger than 6 years of age are significantly higher than those of girls, as measured by respondents (guardians') self-reporting. This difference is heightened particularly in rural areas. It is not apparent if the gender difference is due to higher rates of reporting of illness, or greater actual illness among boys than girls. Children aged between 6 and 10 exhibit no significant gender differences in rates of reported illness.

Boys and girls have equal rates of vaccination.

Approximately 58 percent of children aged over 12 months are reported to have received the basic set of vaccinations (BCG, DPT, Polio and Tetanus), and there is no gender difference apparent in vaccination rates. However, children born to women with at least primary education report significantly higher rates of vaccination than those born to women with less than primary, or no education.

Boys and girls have equal access to health care when reported ill.

About one-half of all children less than 6 years of age utilised health services in a four-week period. Of those who were ill during this period, 86 percent utilised health services. There is little gender difference in the rate of access to health care, although girls in urban areas have significantly higher rates of contact than girls in rural areas, when ill. Boys also report higher rates of contact in urban areas, but the difference is less.

A mother's education impacts on a child's access to health care.

A mother's level of education has a great impact on access to health care for children, particularly for girls. Only 65 percent of girls under the age of 6 who were ill had accessed a health care practitioner, when their mother had no education. The proportion of ill young girls accessing health care jumps to 88 percent with as little as one to four years of education for the mother. For boys, this impact sees access rise from 74 percent to 91 percent, when ill. A father's level of education has little impact on health care for either girls or boys.

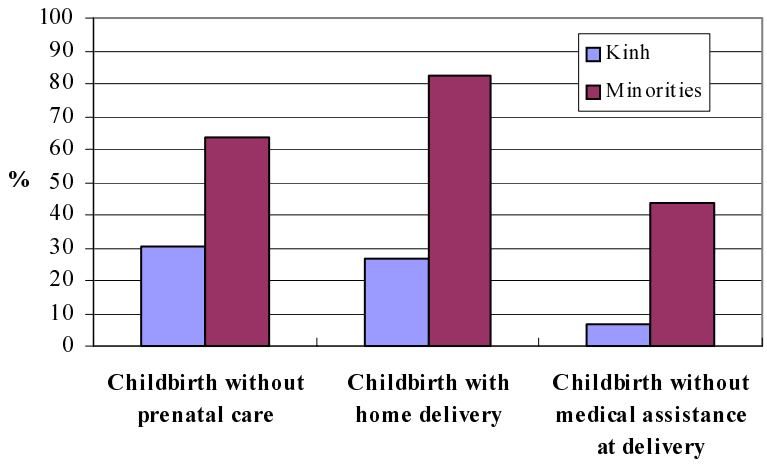
4.4. Pregnancy and Contraception

Pre-natal care is low amongst women from disadvantaged households.

Almost two thirds of all women who are pregnant obtain pre-natal care, though the average number of consultations (1.7) is less than optimal (3), as defined by the Vietnamese Ministry of Health. Use of pre-natal care has increased in the past 5 years, but it still tends to be low among women from poorer households, women of ethnic minority, and women with less than primary education. Eighty one percent of urban women obtain pre-natal care, compared to only 62 percent of rural women.

Figure 13 shows conditions of childbirth by women's ethnicity.

Figure 13: Conditions of Child Birth by Woman's Ethnicity, 1997-98



Delivery at home is common.

Approximately one third (31%) of all women give birth in hospitals. Another third deliver in commune health centres, with the final third delivering at home. Delivery at home is typically more frequent among rural women. Forty-four percent of women in rural areas deliver at home, compared to only 7 percent of urban women. Home delivery is overwhelmingly prevalent amongst women from the poorest households, women of ethnic minority and women with no education.

Doctors assist at 44 percent of all births. Nurses, midwives and traditional birth attendants assist a similar proportion of deliveries. Approximately 30 percent of deliveries on combined average amongst women from the poorest households, women of ethnic minority, and women with no education are unassisted by trained health personnel.

IUD use is predominant. Condom use has increased slightly.

Modern medical contraceptive use is prevalent among married women, with IUDs the most frequently used method. Among married women who have not had any children, contraceptive use is minimal. In urban areas, contraceptive use increases after the first birth and in rural areas it is the second birth that marks a large increase in use. In both rural and urban areas, use of modern contraceptives is significantly higher if one of the first two births results in boys.

In rural areas, 73 percent of married women who use contraception use IUDs. In urban areas, the method mix is more diverse but IUDs still account for 61 percent of all married women who use contraceptives. The share of condoms in the method mix has grown in the past 5 years but still remains minimal at 6%. Traditional methods such as the rhythm method and withdrawal are also popular.

5. Determinants of Poverty and Living Conditions

5.1. Poverty Indicators

Poverty is a multi-faceted phenomenon which affects not only the ability to purchase goods, but also vulnerability towards various pressures that may prohibit an individual from enjoying life. This vulnerability may be gauged from living conditions such as employment, health, education, and housing. It is important to monitor gender differences in poverty, vulnerability and living conditions, and also to understand the causes of these differences, in order to prepare strategies for more efficient intervention schemes aimed at poverty reduction.

Poverty typically is measured by purchasing power or per capita expenditures made by the household, in the form of poverty rates or expenditure quintiles. Purchasing power has a strong correlation to most other living condition indices and is therefore used as a main indicator of poverty and vulnerability. Productivity and incomes from occupations and livelihoods are important factors for reducing poverty. Social conditions such as health, nutrition, education and housing influence productivity, thus affecting poverty status. These in turn are influenced by poverty, affecting the ability of households to gain access to adequate social conditions to improve their productivity. Efforts towards poverty alleviation therefore, require a complete intervention scheme, not simply in economic aspects, but including social dimensions as well, so that poverty may be addressed as a socio-economic phenomenon.

5.2. Variables in Poverty and Living Conditions

Analysis of determinants of poverty is essential for preparing strategies towards efficient intervention.

This section of the report presents results of a multi -variate analysis of the relationship between various social and economic aspects of living conditions and poverty as measured by purchasing power. The data provides a picture of the living conditions in Viet Nam, and evaluates the various probable determinants of these living conditions. It provides valuable indicators of poverty in order to inform suggestions for poverty reduction policy reform in the light of gender analysis.

Multi-variate analysis of the likely determinants of poverty was conducted separately for female-headed households and all households (a majority of which are male-headed) and for male and female individuals. The results show the probable differences in factors such as education and place of residence that affect poverty amongst FHHs compared to all households, when other characteristics such as education, age, ethnicity, etc. are the same. Poverty is typically determined at a household level. Therefore, this section focuses primarily on the regression results of FHHs versus all households rather than individual level results.

Interactions of economic and social dimensions of poverty must be researched, as strong inter-linkages exist.

The analysis is presented in terms of location of households in order to identify geographic determinants of poverty when other factors such as educational level, ethnicity and employment are held constant. Such analysis will help determine whether geographic targeting (with lower administrative costs) or other forms of targeting form more appropriate poverty reduction strategies.

The link between poverty and rural residence is strong but appears to be more important for FHHs than for all households.

Rural residence is strongly correlated with poverty overall, but more so for FHHs compared to all households. For individuals, when the sex of the household head is held constant, rural residence has a higher impact on the probability of an individual living in poverty amongst males than amongst females. Clearly the relationship between gender, urban/rural residence and poverty is complex. Nevertheless, targeting of poverty reduction efforts for both men and women in rural areas is important, and special efforts aimed at FHHs may be required.

Regional and provincial differences in probability of being in poverty among FHHs suggest that geographic targeting may be important.

Region of residence also has a strong association with household poverty. For all households, when other factors were held constant, residence in provinces of the Southeast region led to a lower likelihood of poverty compared to other regions. Other regions had the same or higher probability of poverty compared to Bac Lieu province in the Mekong Delta which was the comparator. However, FHHs in most provinces exhibited higher probability of poverty than in Bac Lieu province, which is a relatively poor province. Further research may be required into these provincial level effects before geographic targeting is used for gender-specific poverty reduction programmes.

Female headed households from Kinh and Muong groups had lower likelihood of poverty compared to other ethnic groups. This finding supports earlier studies showing a need to focus gender based poverty interventions among ethnic groups other than among the Kinh or ethnic groups that closely resemble the Kinh.

Targeting of gender-specific interventions among ethnic minorities will be important.

The higher the educational attainment, the lower the likelihood of poverty for all households and for FHHs, even with occupation and geographic residence held constant. The greater the share of household members receiving apprenticeships or informal training, the lower the odds of poverty overall, but for FHHs, the impact is slightly stronger.

Educational improvements pay off for FHHs.

The data analysis does not show an association between age of household head and poverty within FHHs. However, in the analysis of all households, older household heads still of working age tend to have a lower likelihood of poverty. As a household head grows older, experience, accumulated capital and greater labour supply (due to less childcare, older aged children), is typically associated with lower poverty. However, the nominated household heads in FHHs may not be the true decision-making household head, but rather someone, usually older, selected for administrative reasons. The relationship between age of household head and poverty may not be so clear, and inferences should be used with caution.

A clearer definition of what constitutes a FHH household is warranted both for research and targeting purposes.

Household size does not affect the probability of FHHs in poverty, except for the case of one-person households where the likelihood of poverty for one-person FHHs is substantially higher than for MHHs. Single-person households typically involve a lack of labour, which is more detrimental to women than to men when other factors are held constant. The group of single-person households is likely to be small, and overall not very likely to be in poverty, but single female households should nevertheless be considered as a special target group for interventions. More detailed analysis of labour supply within different types of households may be required to understand gender differences in poverty.

Single person households may require specific interventions.

6. Broad Gender Responsive Policy Framework

Differences in socio-economic factors alone do not explain differences in poverty between FHHs and others implying a need for gender-specific interventions.

Research results indicate that gender-specific interventions are warranted to ensure equality of development in Viet Nam. Gender differences are apparent in socio-economic conditions such as education, employment and income. There are also interactions between socio-geographic attributes and sex of household head, on living conditions. Gender differences and the effect of these characteristics on poverty need to be considered in developing poverty reduction policies.

It appears that both demand and supply factors are affecting gender differences in socio-economic outcomes, requiring a mix of policies to overcome them.

Analysis distinguishing between demand and supply factors is important because it will determine the design of public policy. If market conditions and the institutional context within which individuals make decisions are found to be the main sources of unequal outcomes, then policy needs to focus on modifying these "supply side" factors. If on the other hand, inequality is traced to the decisions made by individuals, possibly due to gender-based differences in preferences, traditional attitudes to gender roles, access to assets and control over income, then the primary emphasis of policy should be on the "demand side". Gender differences in educational enrolments, employment and access to resources identified in this report most probably result from a combination of demand and supply factors, so a mixed policy may be required.

Policy will have to impact both external institutions and household behaviour.

Gender equalising policy may be directed either to external institutions that provide the goods and services, or directed toward households, to change individual behaviours, or directed to both. In discerning policy interventions, governments have a wide range of options for correcting gender imbalances. These include the direct provision of goods and services, the financing of private provision, income transfers, taxation and directives on what can and cannot be done. The choice of policy tools requires careful examination of the different factors influencing a particular outcome and the constraints different policy options might face in correcting existing inequalities.

Sharing of resources in households creates difficulties in identifying and targeting in gender policy.

The pattern of sharing resources and income within households presents gender responsive policy with an "identification and targeting" problem. Analyses of the VLSS data do not provide for identification of the individual benefits of policies and assurance that only the intended beneficiary receives the benefit.

Characteristics of policies are important to ensure that women benefit when policies are directed at households.

One main concern for gender responsive policy is the potential for reallocation of resources within the household, in response to policies and changes in the external environment. In this context, the most effective policies are likely to be (a) those that provide benefits that are individually identifiable, and non-substitutable, and (b) those that increase women's bargaining position within the household so as to prevent (general) resource re-allocation that is not beneficial to them. The emphasis in this case is on

policies that are "individualised" in some sense. A second set of policies consist of those that increase women's incomes in the short run, even though the benefit is (a) shared with others in the household, and (b) can be appropriated by others through re-allocation of resources.

Certain policies are better able to target women than others in achieving reallocation of resources.

The encouragement of female post-primary education, policies that promote individual ownership of assets, and increased female access to formal credit, along with reproductive health services (of better quality and at lower cost), are likely to be most effective. These target benefits to individuals and in such instances the benefits cannot be appropriated through a re-allocation of resources. In addition, provision of information for women regarding their legal rights, which in fact are egalitarian in Viet Nam, is critical.

Effects of income generation policies for women are likely to be diluted because of reallocation of benefits within the household.

A second tier of policy interventions would be those that increase women's incomes in the short run, while recognising that a re-allocation of household activities could result in these benefits being relatively short-lived. Increasing technical assistance to livestock maintenance, and small-scale non-farm enterprises (particularly those engaged in retail sales) is likely to benefit women (more than men) because current activity patterns indicate greater female involvement in these sectors.

Simpler, less expensive indicators than income or expenditure can be used for monitoring gender inequality.

Vulnerability is commonly gauged on the more complicated income-expenditure characteristics of households. Such indicators, however, are difficult and very costly to collect. This should not prevent the implementation of appropriate monitoring schemes since more simple correlates of poverty exist that do show gender differentials at the individual level including indices of healthy/hygienic surroundings and hygienic shelter/ample utilities.

Geographic targeting is likely to be important, but more research is required.

Geographic targeting should be considered as an important component of gender policy, but more careful research on sex-disaggregated geographic determinants of poverty is warranted. Rural areas and regions with large numbers of people of ethnic minority require greater gender equality interventions than urban and largely Kinh areas, but finer geographic distinctions and greater specificity of interventions will have to be identified through further research.

7. Conclusions

Gender gaps still persist.

The report provides an overview of the status of women compared to men in the transitional economy of Viet Nam. The findings conclude that while women, girls and FHHs are not uniformly disadvantaged, persistent gender gaps exist in both economic and social spheres. This calls for gender sensitive policy to accelerate the process of transforming the social norms and economic conditions for gender equality for the advancement of women, particular of rural women in Viet Nam.

Lack of data on internal household resource allocation.

The above analysis is constrained by a lack of data on internal household resource allocation that would allow analysis of the existence of gender biases internal to the households. Further analysis is also required for better geographic targeting of interventions to achieve greater gender equality in Viet Nam.

Additional analysis needed on issues such as access to credit, unemployment and domestic violence.

In addition, it would be interesting to collect more data on a number of topics, such as ethnic minority issues, access to credit by women and men, the usage of such credits, unemployment as faced by women and men as well as on domestic violence issues.

Need for regular gender analysis, of sex-disaggregated household data and wide dissemination of results.

Most important is to carry out such gender analysis on a regular basis in order to monitor progress towards the goals set by the Vietnamese Government in a number of strategies, e.g. the Strategy for the Advancement of Women and the CPRGS as well as towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. A second but critical step is the wide dissemination of the research results. The next gender analysis is due in 2003 when the new data from the Viet Nam Household Living Survey 2002 will be available.

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