



Delegation of the European Union to Vietnam



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United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN VIET NAM:

MAKING INCLUSIVE GROWTH WORK FOR WOMEN



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Published 1st edition 2016

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MAKING INCLUSIVE GROWTH WORK FOR WOMEN

SUMMARY

FROM GENDER EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW TO GENDER EQUALITY IN THE ECONOMY: UNDERSTANDING THE LINKS AND PROMOTING POLICY

KEY AIMS OF THE STUDY

Viet Nam has made considerable progress on legal provisions that promote gender equality, particularly in the last decade. These include, among others, the 2006 Law on Gender Equality, the 2007 Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, and new extended specifications of women's labour rights in the 2012 Labour Code. The translation of equality before the law into substantive equality, however, is not an automatic process and has not yet been achieved. Current debates in policy circles stress the need for Viet Nam to promote a new and more inclusive growth model. Special attention must be paid to the groups that face multiple disadvantages because of their gender, ethnicity, social status and place of residence. The study seeks to contribute

to these debates on economic policies with emphasis on ensuring that no woman or girl is left behind.

Realizing women's and girls' economic rights requires more than just legal reforms: designing as well as implementing sound and equitable economic policies is crucial to this objective. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative evidence on various aspects of Viet Nam's economic structure and policies, this study proposes a comprehensive agenda for policy actors to redress women's and girls' socio-economic disadvantages and strengthen the success of the new Social Economic Development Plan.

ECONOMIC GROWTH DOES NOT NECESSARILY TRANSLATE INTO GREATER GENDER EQUALITY

Economic growth does not necessarily translate into the enhancement of human capabilities for all and greater gender equality. The pattern of growth is a determining factor; some patterns build on gender inequalities rather than reduce them. Research has shown, for example, that the export strategy of a number of semi-industrialized export oriented economies (SIEOs) in East and South-East Asia has focused on labour-intensive goods produced by cheap female labour, taking

advantage of large gender wage gaps. This has stimulated profits in the short term, but this type of growth, based on enhancing global competitiveness by lowering labour costs, is neither gender-equitable nor sustainable. Most SIEOs have high female labour force participation rates by global standards, but, equally, their gender-based wage inequality is pronounced relative to other parts of the world. Their model of social welfare provision largely remains a

familialistic male breadwinner model, in which care provision outside the family is limited. Unpaid care work is essential for the development of human capabilities, the bulk of which is carried out typically by women, with the result that their time is often squeezed.ⁱ The evidence also points to a defeminization of industrial employment in more recent years in East Asia as well as in Malaysia and Indonesia.ⁱⁱ This suggests that women may be the preferred labour force only in the early stages of industrialization but they tend to lose out when production becomes more capital-

intensive and industries upgrade. This finding has important policy implications to be considered by the Vietnamese Government in its current plans to upgrade its manufacturing sectors.

An economic growth model that promotes substantive gender equality and social justice needs to include: measures to reduce gender gaps in access to skills, assets and decent jobs; increased public investment in social services and infrastructure; and adequate levels of care provision for all.ⁱⁱⁱ



ECONOMIC GROWTH IS THE OUTCOME OF SEVERAL POLICIES, EACH HAVING GENDER EFFECTS

Economic growth is the outcome of several policies. Hence, understanding the gender effects of Viet Nam's prevailing economic growth model and how it can be improved to reduce persisting gender gaps first entails identifying the specific policies in question and choosing the relevant measures of gender inequality. As regards specific policies, the emphasis of this study is primarily on social and physical infrastructure, trade

liberalization, agricultural and industrial policies. As regards measures of gender inequality, the emphasis of this study is on measures that include both paid and unpaid dimensions in the economic domain. The effective implementation of these policies is essential to prepare Viet Nam for the challenge of maximizing the benefits from greater integration into the global economy.

The way that governments design and implement public spending, trade reforms, or even monetary policy has the potential to reduce or amplify gender-based inequalities. For instance, greater public investment in basic social services and infrastructure such as health, education, water and sanitation is likely to promote gender equality because they are critical to reduce women's unpaid work. They can also enhance women's capacity to access paid work and participate in political decision-making. What is important, however, is not only the aggregate level of social investment, but also whether the public money allocated to programmes is actually spent and whether they

are actually implemented according to gender equality and inclusiveness criteria. For example, to what extent does public provision of early childhood education (ECE) take into account the needs of low-income working mothers? And is ECE accessible to girls (and boys) regardless of their mothers' job or migration status? To what extent is investment in improved sanitation infrastructure reaching the most remote communities? Are there mechanisms to ensure that disadvantaged women participate in high-quality skills training, and as a result find employment in better paid occupations? These are examples of the kind of questions that the study aims to address.

THE ANALYTICAL APPROACH OF THE STUDY: BUILDING A STATISTICAL GENDER MAP AND SCOPING POLICIES

The approach adopted by the study involves two main steps. The first step is to examine the economic structure of Viet Nam in detail, through statistics, and identify where gender gaps are more persistent, that is, to describe *the economy as a gendered structure*. The second step is to analyse a selection of policies to assess whether at present Viet Nam's economic strategy is contributing to reduce or intensify such gender gaps. The analysis is by no means exhaustive and should be seen only as a starting point. What this study offers is the first comprehensive statistical gender map of Viet Nam's economy of its kind and an initial scoping of key policy issues. These together provide a sound base for any gender impact assessment of specific aspects of Viet Nam's macroeconomic policies or sectoral policies that the Government may want to develop in the future.

Examining the economy of a country as a gendered structure entails identifying gender-based distortions in the patterns of resource allocation regarding jobs, income, other assets and time. These distortions act as barriers to economic and social development. For example, as a result of biases in labour markets, women have to work in

a limited range of occupations and their earnings tend not to fully reflect their contribution. This is not only a breach of labour rights, but it is also bad for the economy because it makes it harder for a country to build the productivity capacity of its current and future labour force.

An essential task in exposing the gender characteristics of an economy is to render visible unpaid domestic work and care such as cleaning, cooking, collecting water and fuel, as well as looking after children, the elderly and adults. By sustaining the healthy development of the labour force, these activities are vital for both improving living standards and ensuring the effective functioning of the market economy in a country. These unpaid care activities, however, are rarely recognized in economic planning. This is a serious omission that can create the illusion of efficiency gains when in fact costs are being transferred from the public sector to the private sphere, with disproportionate negative impacts on women, who are the primary caregivers. Globally, unpaid domestic and care work is mostly undertaken by women, particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable women. The double burden of unpaid and paid work undermines women's position in the paid

labour market and other markets, and makes them vulnerable within their own household. As argued throughout the study, the State has an important role to play in redressing these inequalities. Public support for care provision is critical for gender equality and a necessary precondition for the successful creation of productive and decent employment.

Gender intersects with different sources of disadvantage such as a lack of income or education, place of residence and ethnicity, and it is also important to expose biases in the distribution of economic resources and opportunities along these lines. Planning for inclusive economic growth must involve paying special attention to the groups of women who are further marginalized because of where they live, their background or the stage in their life cycle. One aim of the study is indeed to highlight not only the gender, but also the spatial, ethnic and age-based differences that are often masked by headline socio-economic indicators and thereby contribute to the debate on translating the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into

well-tailored indicators for implementation and monitoring on the ground.

As emphasized in the *Progress of World's Women*,^{iv} a policy agenda to promote the full realization of women's economic and social rights needs to be built around two key interrelated goals: (i) strengthening women's position in paid work by improving their opportunities for decent jobs; and (ii) recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work. The study analyses selected policies related to both goals. It focuses on the specific vulnerabilities associated with three occupations characterized by both high female intensity and employment insecurity – small-scale farming, domestic paid work and garment factory work – and examines measures to make these occupations more secure and more profitable. It also explores the extent to which the Vietnamese Government has incorporated the objective of reducing and redistributing unpaid work in its policies, with special attention to rural infrastructure investment and the provision of early childhood education and care (ECEC).

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF VIET NAM'S CURRENT SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS

Much like other SIEOs, in the last decade, Viet Nam has energetically sought greater regional and global integration, and promoted an industrialization strategy centred on exports. The growth of manufacturing, garment and particularly electronics, has been impressive in recent years. However, the resulting employment opportunities so far have been largely concentrated in unskilled jobs. Opportunities for training, skills development and promotion in these sectors have been limited, especially for women. Another drawback of the current configuration of these industries is that they rely heavily on imported raw materials, thus limiting prospects for backward linkages with other sectors of the economy, and for upgrading. The agricultural sector in particular seems not to be

sufficiently integrated with more dynamic parts of the economy. The establishment of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community in early 2015 and the signing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in late 2015 are further steps towards Viet Nam's greater trade integration. Viet Nam's participation in these new trade agreements opens up a range of exciting opportunities, but also increases its exposure to the global economy. This exposure is likely to make Viet Nam vulnerable unless a vigorous policy of human capacities and skills development, with particular attention to women and girls, is put in place. This will require a more equitable public provision of quality education, health and other care services.

From a gender and care perspective, the Viet Nam model of social welfare is characterized by limited public support for care services and rigid gender norms that still assign primary responsibility for care provision to women within the private sphere of the household. For example, access to health is socially stratified and skewed against low-income women and internal migrants.^v Similarly, the provision of services such as water infrastructure and ECE appears skewed against rural populations, particularly rural ethnic minorities living in remote areas.

The next sections report key findings of the study and offer a number of specific suggestions for steps that the Government can take to generate better outcomes for disadvantaged women and girls. It is hoped that these recommendations will facilitate Viet Nam's transition towards an economic model that strongly emphasizes decent jobs creation, inclusive public provision and gender equality.

THE STATISTICAL PICTURE OF VIET NAM'S ECONOMY AS A GENDERED STRUCTURE

The statistical picture of Viet Nam as a gendered structure exposes how economic resources and opportunities are unequally distributed across different groups of women and men, and relates these patterns to the structure of the economy. In terms of economic structure, today Viet Nam appears to still be a country 'in-between', moving away from its agriculture-based neighbours Cambodia and Lao PDR, but still not having made the complete transition to a structure with fully developed industrial and service sectors such as that of Malaysia or Thailand. In South-East Asia, Viet Nam has one of the highest female labour force participation and is also the most open economy, which constitutes both an opportunity and a vulnerability.

This gender statistical picture draws on a range of nationally representative surveys such as the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS), the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), which have been analysed in combination with each other. The main focus is on data from the latest year available (usually 2014 or 2012), but patterns over the last decade are also described

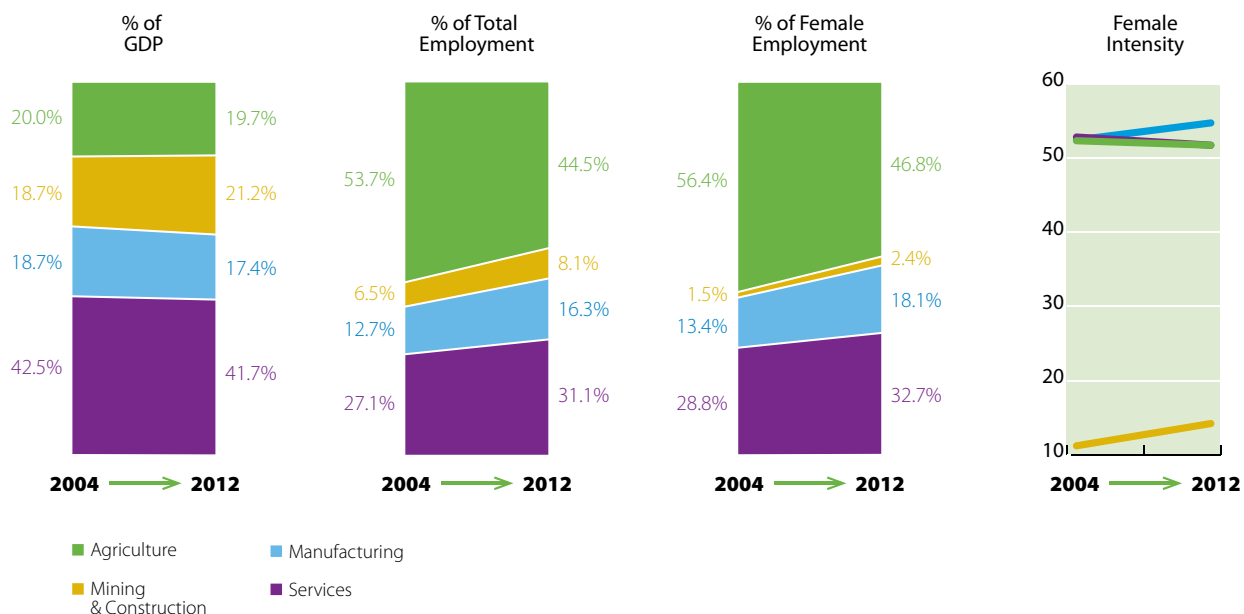
whenever possible to offer a perspective of how inequalities may have changed over time. The analysis seeks to capture both paid work and unpaid work dimensions, and also highlights differences between economic sectors, region and household groups. It describes employment trends in both agriculture and non-agricultural sectors, and in relation to export trends. Gender patterns in various aspects of job quality such as working conditions and earnings are also highlighted. Differential access to household basic infrastructure is used as a proxy to capture the extent of unpaid domestic work by income, ethnicity and location. What emerges from this picture is that the gaps most resistant to change include: gender gaps in agriculture, the disadvantage of ethnic minority women in particular, and income-based inequalities in access to physical and social infrastructure. Areas that show dynamism are related to the growth of wage employment and export-oriented manufacturing, and seem to provide new opportunities, although largely to young and relatively well-educated women.

KEY FINDINGS

OVERALL PATTERNS IN THE PAID ECONOMY

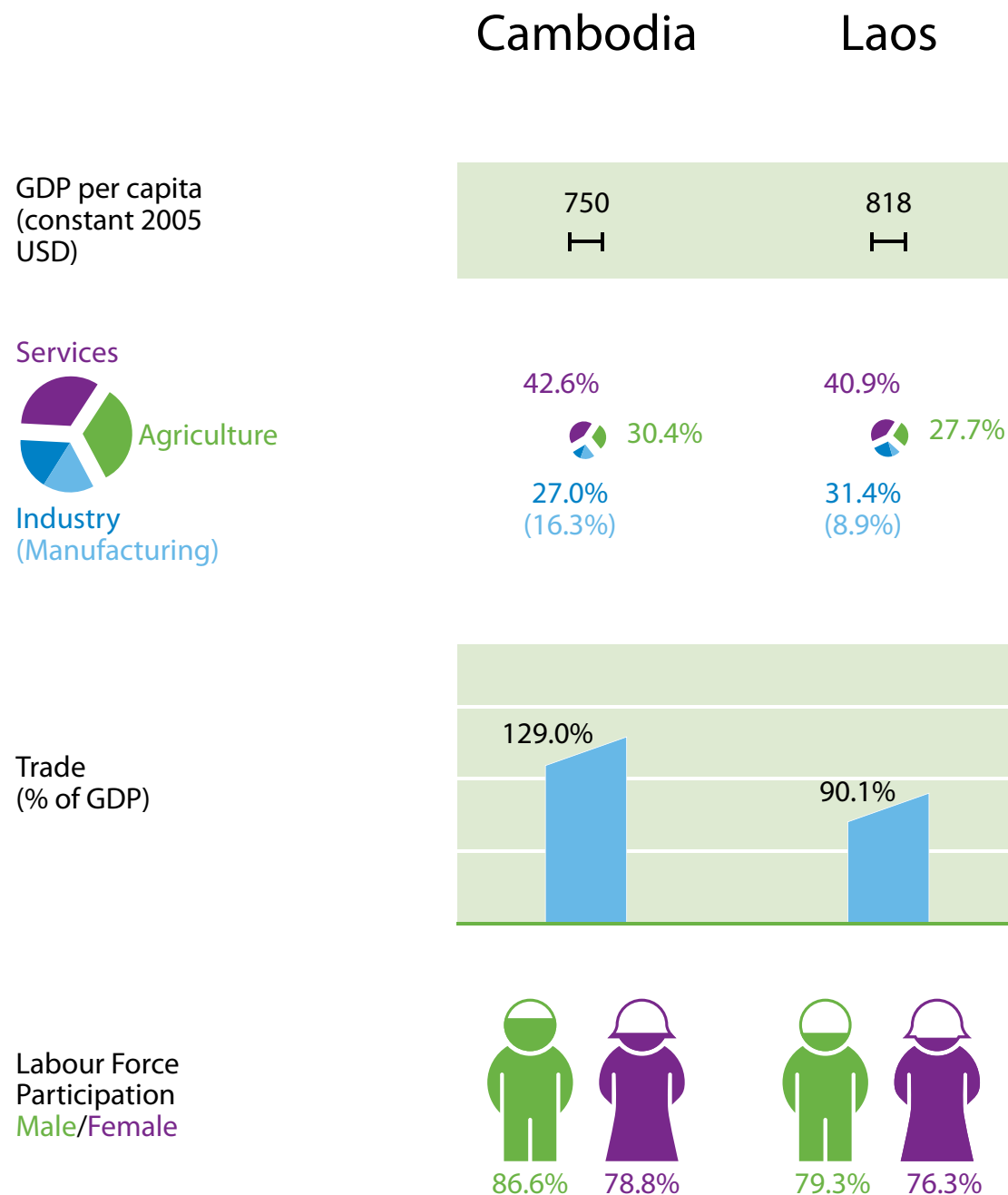
- The last decade has seen little change in the structure of Viet Nam's gross domestic product (GDP), but a substantial change in the structure of employment, away from agriculture and towards manufacturing and services, which suggests slow growth in labour productivity in these sectors.
- Agriculture remains the employer of about half of the labour force and is by far the main source of livelihoods for ethnic minorities. This is in contrast to many of Viet Nam's South-East Asian neighbours including Thailand and Indonesia, where the share of the female (and male) labour force in agriculture is smaller.
- Female employment in manufacturing is growing at a faster pace than male employment. Low labour productivity in this sector has gender connotations.
- More women than men are in vulnerable employment. In particular, the gender gap in vulnerable employment is particularly high for older workers.
- Vulnerability and informality are highest among ethnic minorities, reflecting their strong presence in agriculture.
- The proportion of women in the 'unpaid family worker' category has declined in the last five years, whereas the proportion of women in the 'wage worker' category has increased.
- The proportion of wage workers without social insurance is higher among men than among women due to male workers' higher representation in the domestic private sector.

Output and gender patterns of employment by aggregate industrial sector, Viet Nam, 2004 and 2012



VIET NAM IN CONTEXT

Output and employment structure in selected South-East Asian Countries, 2012



Viet Nam

Indonesia

Thailand

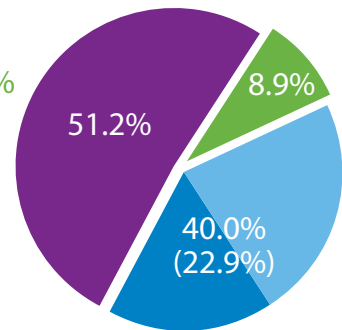
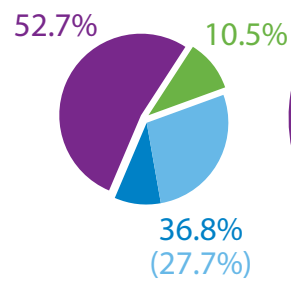
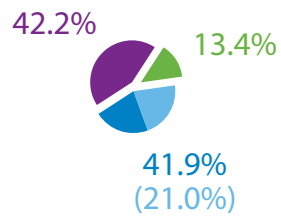
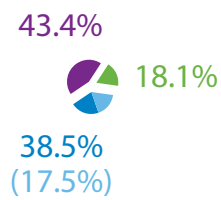
Malaysia

1078

1854

3769

7365

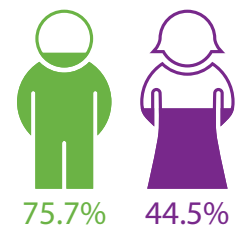
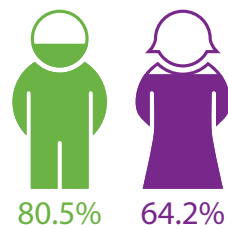
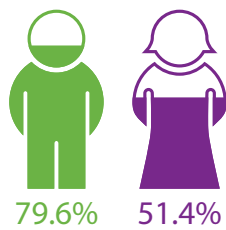
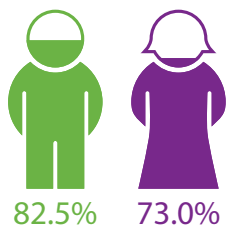


169.5%

131.8%

138.5%

48.2%



KEY FINDINGS

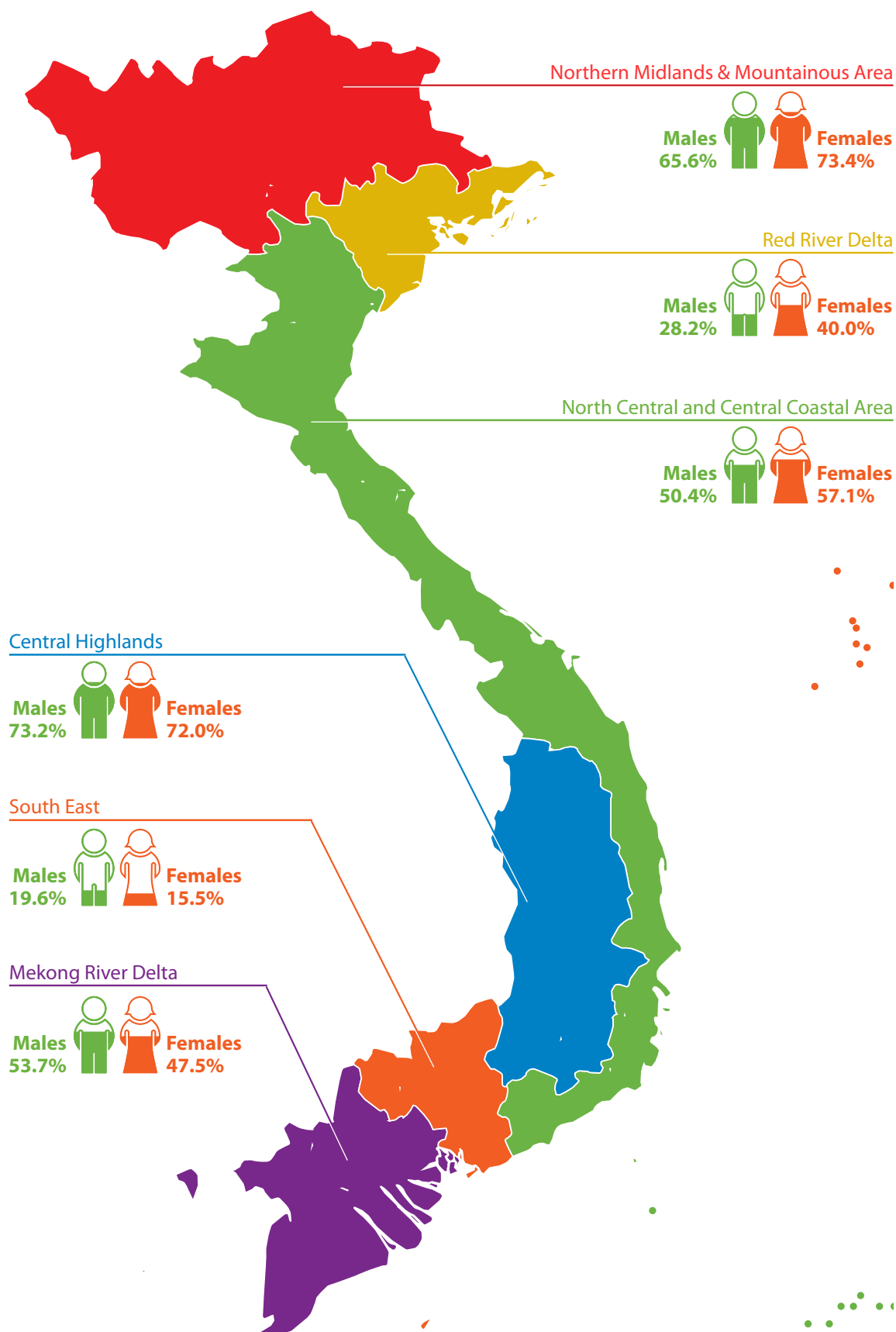
AGRICULTURE

- There are significant spatial and ethnic gender inequalities in Vietnamese agriculture, which have not changed since 2008.
- Agriculture is a more important source of livelihood for women than for men in the north but not in the south.
- In the Northern Midlands and the Central Highlands, three quarters of women work in agriculture compared to only one quarter in the South-East.
- A large share of women farmers work as 'unpaid family workers', which is the most vulnerable form of employment.
- The incidence of agricultural self-employment is much higher among women from ethnic minorities, by a factor of more than two.
- A considerable share of female farmers rely on multiple jobs for survival. This trend is particularly prevalent in the poorest regions.
- Women farmers tend to be older and less likely to have any formal education than women in other occupations.

WAGE WORK

- The level of gender segregation in paid employment is high. Reflecting similar patterns in other parts of the world, in manufacturing, women cluster in the garment and footwear industry; in services, they cluster in trade, hotel and restaurants, education and paid domestic work
- The main export-oriented sectors in manufacturing are female-intensive. Either they were female-intensive to start with (garments), or are increasingly becoming so (electronics and vehicle parts).
- Wage employment offers more favourable conditions to women workers, who are more likely than men to be employed in foreign-owned enterprises.
- As a result of being employed in foreign-owned enterprises, more female than male wage workers have contracts, but more females than males are paid by the piece, which most commonly occurs in the garment and footwear industries. In the absence of adequate legislation and monitoring, this may cause female workers to have to carry out unpaid overtime work.
- In the garment industry, women are less likely than men to receive training and to be promoted. Similar patterns are likely to be found in other segments of manufacturing.

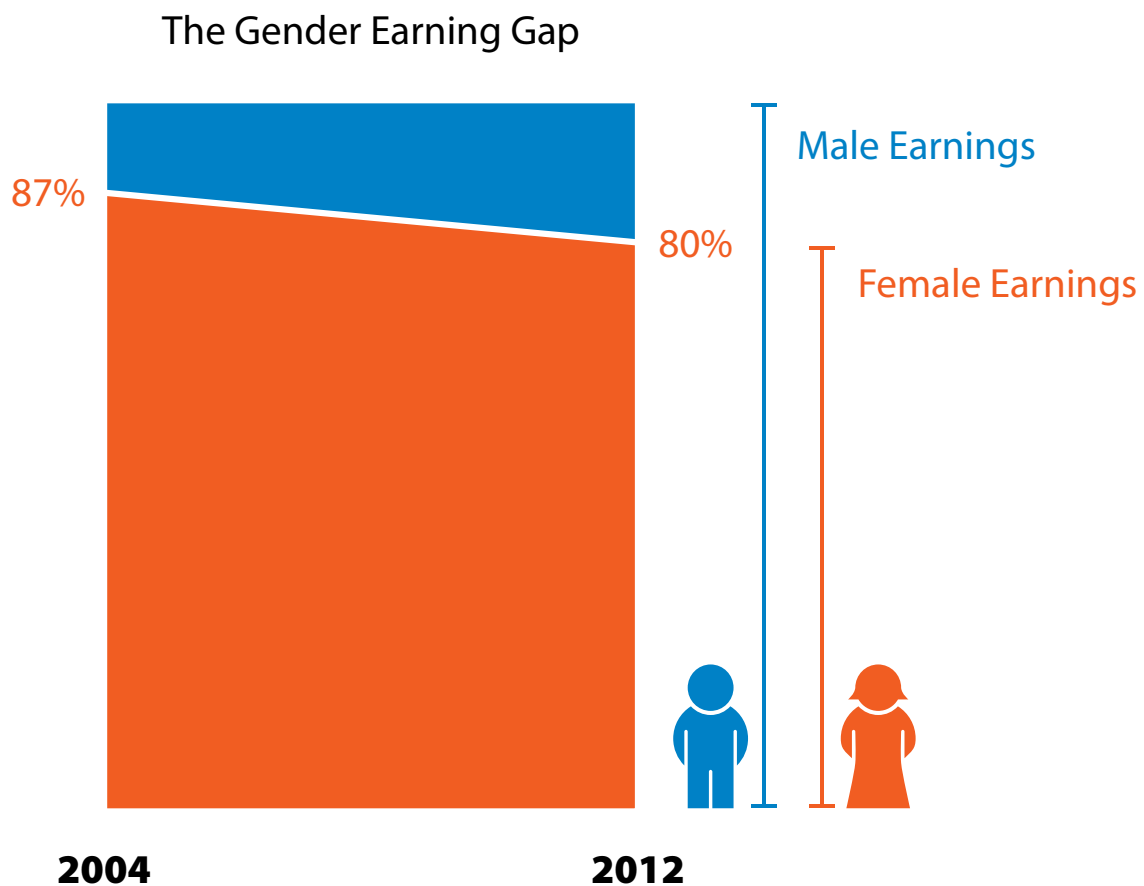
Regional differences: Employment shares in agriculture by sex, 2014



KEY FINDINGS

THE GENDER EARNING GAP

- Over approximately the last ten years, the gender earning gap has widened, with female earnings increasing from 87 per cent of male earnings in 2004 to 80 per cent of male earnings in 2012.
- A portion of the gender earning gap is explained by women clustering in low-paid sectors and occupations, and working part-time. However, a significant portion of the gap remains unexplained, suggesting 'structural discrimination'.
- Underlining causes of the widening gender gap include: a decline in the share of employed women with technical qualifications (relative to an increase in the share for men); fields of study that remain strongly gender-stratified; persistent employers' stereotypes reflected, for instance, in that job advertisements for senior positions often indicate a gender preference for males despite this being against the law.

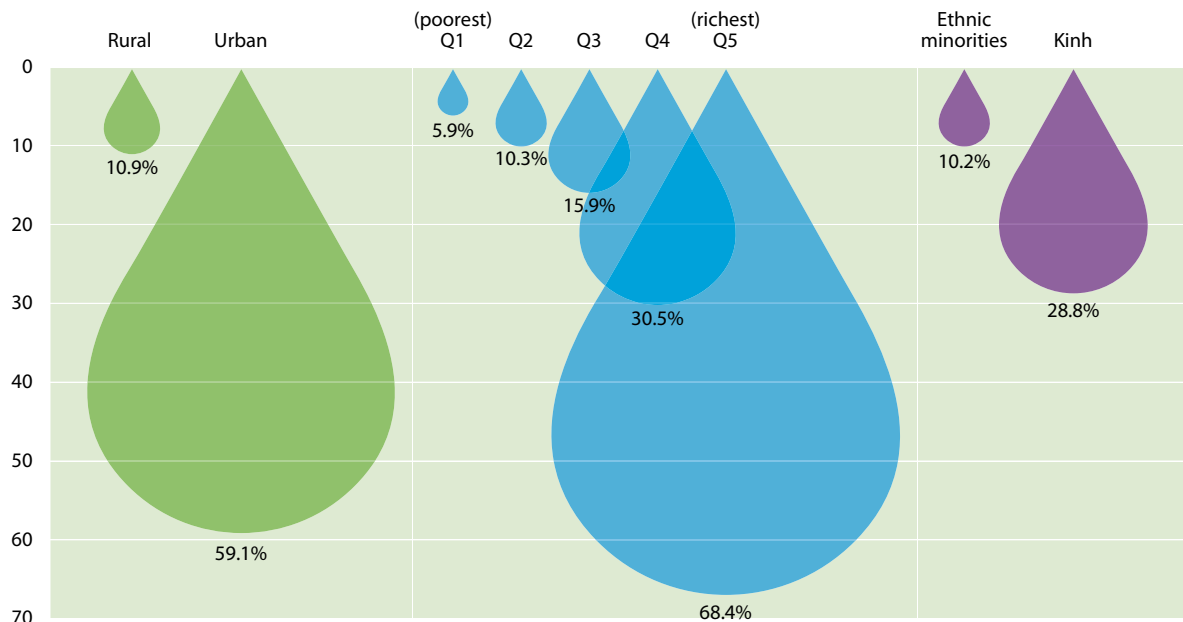


KEY FINDINGS

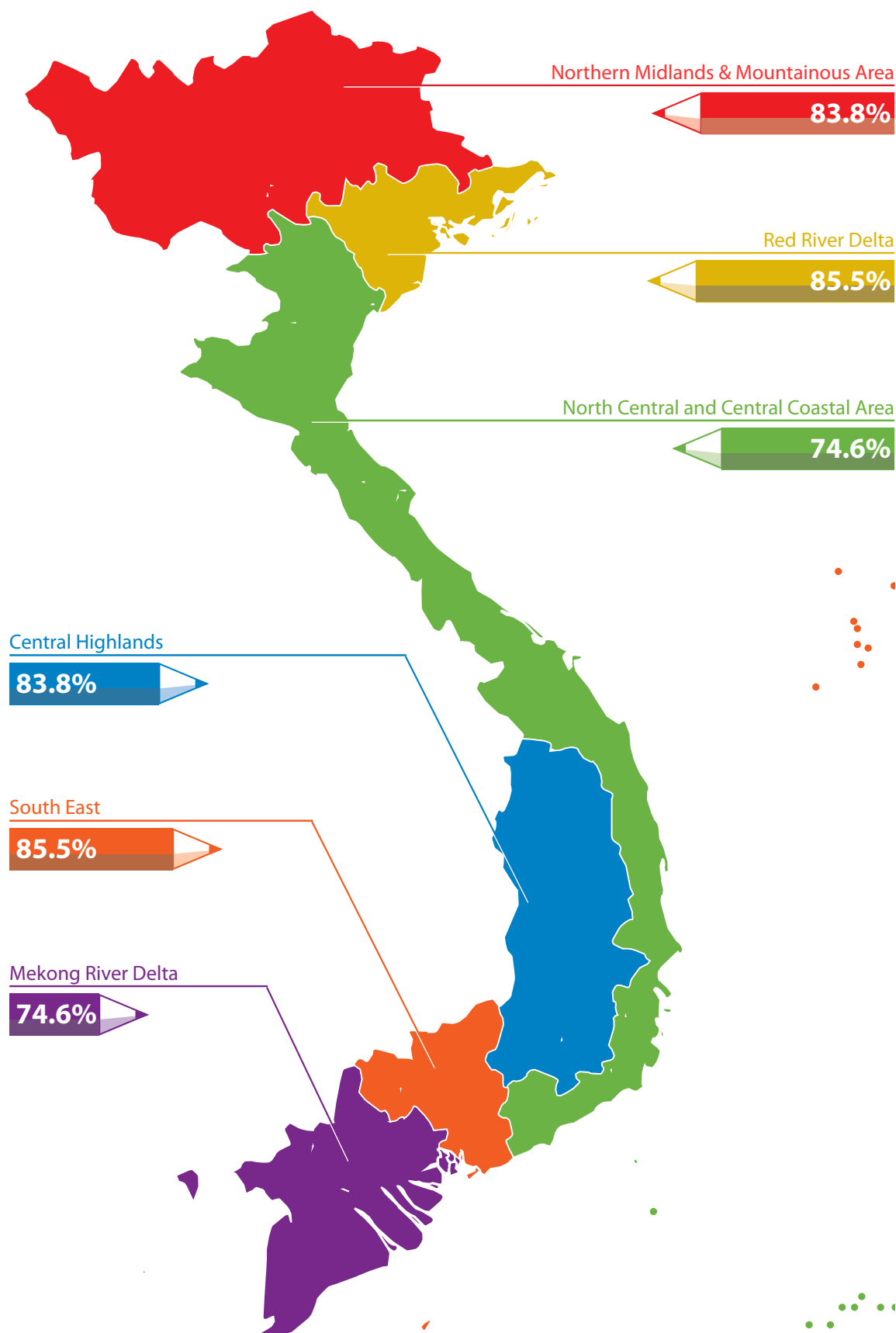
THE UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF UNPAID DOMESTIC WORK AND CARE

- Access to water and sanitation, particularly safe tap water, is more limited among poor households and in rural areas.
- Water collection is a cumbersome activity for disadvantaged households, especially for ethnic minority households, where this task requires more than 30 minutes per trip every day in 20 per cent of cases.
- Access to ECEC services is more limited among the poorest households and in rural areas, where attendance is as low as 53 per cent and even lower in some regions.
- Fathers are more likely to be involved in learning activities with children in wealthy households.
- No progress has been made in addressing any of these inequalities in access to physical and social infrastructure in the past few years.

Household access to piped water on premises by residence, wealth quintile and ethnicity, 2014



Regional differences: Proportion of children attending early childhood education, 2014



PRIORITIES FOR POLICY: FILL THE GAPS IN STATISTICS

Without regular data collection and monitoring over a range of gender and inequality indicators, policies cannot be equitably and effectively designed and implemented. To be useful for policy analysis, the gender statistical picture of an economy must: (i) include multiple layers and dimensions (a few headline indicators cannot adequately capture the full extent of gender-based inequalities); (ii) include both paid and unpaid dimensions, and be highly disaggregated; and (iii) be produced in a timely manner and at regular intervals to enable understanding of gender-differentiated impacts of policies over time. Some progress has been made in the last few years in the collection of gender statistics, but gaps are still severe and need to be addressed by both promoting new surveys and adding to existing ones in the following areas:

NEW SURVEYS

- **TIME USE DATA.** Despite frequent calls for better statistics and research on care burdens and care needs, these areas remain considerably under-documented. A nationally representative time use survey (TUS) for Viet Nam is essential to systematically document the distribution of unpaid work by sex, income and place of residence. This would allow to monitor progress towards various Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets and guide allocations of public finance across specific sectors by indicating where public services are needed the most to reduce and redistribute unpaid work. In order to be most useful to budgetary analysis and government planning, the Viet Nam TUS will have to be designed as a large-scale representative survey and compatible with other surveys on households' access to infrastructure, social services and home technologies.
- **SPECIAL SURVEY ON PAID DOMESTIC WORKERS** and other most precarious forms of informal employment (e.g. street vendors).

- **DATA ON THE ELDERLY**, their care needs and use of social services.

ADDITIONS TO EXISTING SURVEYS

- **AGRICULTURE, SELF-EMPLOYMENT AND INTRA-HOUSEHOLD RESOURCE ALLOCATION.** Gender dynamics in agricultural production should be better documented. Agricultural surveys should ask about crops, tasks, assets and use of rural services at the individual level, not at the household level. Both the Rural, Agricultural and Fishery Census and modules of the Viet Nam Household Living Standard Survey (VHLSS) (e.g. on the farm household, land certificates, land and water use) should reflect these changes. This would provide a great opportunity for intra-household analysis and could be extended to forms of self-employment other than agriculture.
- **ADDITIONAL LABOUR STATISTICS** on hourly earnings, on-the-job training and promotion prospects of wage workers.
- **ENTERPRISE SURVEYS** to collect data on employees broken down by skill.
- **MONITORING INDICATOR CLUSTER SURVEY** to collect additional information on mothers' employment status and type of paid work, as well as the full range of childcare arrangements used by households.

All these statistics need to be fully put to use in economic policy analysis and would benefit from being examined systematically and in combination with each other. Concerted action is required to train the relevant staff in the Ministry of Planning, the General Statistical Office and the Gender Equality Department of Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs to harmonize surveys, produce new ones, and ensure that they are regularly used to inform policy design and monitoring.

STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S POSITION IN PAID WORK

Strengthening women's position in paid work entails ensuring that women can access stable employment with safe working conditions, decent pay and social protection. Evidence shows that for some groups of Vietnamese women, however, paid employment does not yet meet these criteria. In Viet Nam, women who are disadvantaged tend to concentrate in a narrow range of occupations that are precarious and informal, and seen as typical women's work with minimal skill requirements. These include, among others, small-scale farming, paid domestic work and garment factory work. Improving working conditions and earnings in these occupations is essential to prevent poor and vulnerable women from continuing to be left behind. It is also essential to ensure that Viet Nam maintains and enhances its international competitiveness in both manufacturing and agriculture as its new trade agreements come into effect.

More than 12 million women (or around 50 per cent of the female labour force) are employed in agriculture and about 1.5 million (or around 6 per cent of the female labour force) in garment manufacturing. According to official statistics, there are a few hundred thousand paid domestic workers, but there are likely to be more. Different groups of women – different status, education and age – tend to cluster in these sectors, each of which represents different forms of vulnerability.

These three occupations, small-scale farming, paid domestic work and garment factory work, together provide the main source of livelihood to more than half of the Vietnamese female labour force and are representative of the range of challenges that different groups of disadvantaged women face in the daily reality of their working life. Making these three occupations safer and more productive should therefore be priority for the Government. The Government should also pay attention to strengthening the position of women in other occupations. In addition to guaranteeing more decent and secure conditions in traditionally female-dominated occupations, the Government needs to put greater effort into facilitating women's access to a wider variety of well remunerated jobs, with particular attention to enabling disadvantaged women to acquire the necessary skills and productive resources for entering new sectors and jobs previously barred to them.

KEY FINDINGS

WOMEN'S SMALL-SCALE FARMING

Female agricultural self-employment continues to be more prevalent among ethnic minorities, in the poorest regions, and in households belonging to the poorest quintile.

The main challenges faced by female farmers relate to their limited ownership of productive assets as well as their restricted access to knowledge, technology, services and markets. While these constraints are also faced by male small-scale farmers, they are exacerbated for female farmers.

In rice producing households that include both a husband and a wife, the intra-household division of tasks and responsibilities tends to be organized along marked gendered patterns, and decision-making is often delegated to men. For example, men operate most motorized equipment and have main control over the sale of agricultural produce. This gender division of roles holds across regions but appears more resistant to change in mountainous areas.

Rural female-headed households involved in agricultural production have smaller plots of land than rural male-headed households, and only a small fraction owns commercial farms. Income levels of rural female-headed households have grown between 2008 and 2014, but the gap in income levels between female- and male-headed households has also widened.

After more than 20 years since the enactment of Viet Nam's 1993 Land Law, the number of female farmers with formal entitlements to agricultural land remains small. Yet, there are important benefits to be gained from strengthening women's land rights in practice:

- Women who have their name on land use certificates (LUCs) on average earn more than women who do not.

- Women holding a LUC also report having greater decision-making power over matters such as borrowing money, purchasing household goods and carrying out transactions related to agricultural production.
- Both LUCs held by women only and LUCs held jointly with husbands reduce the incidence of household poverty by about 5 per cent compared to LUCs held by men only.

Gender-based inequities in the issuance of land-use rights are due to several factors such as:

- a lack of administrative capacity, especially in remote rural provinces;
- difficulties that women have in accessing basic legal services because of bureaucratic procedures and language barriers;
- limited social and support services for women;
- the predominance of inheritance practices privileging sons over daughters;
- local mediation committees operating in accordance to traditional family norms rather than formal laws when resolving disputes over land.

More than half of female farmers have barely completed primary education or even less, and only a tiny fraction have received any technical or vocational training.

Agricultural extension services are biased towards better-off male farmers, further reinforcing their advantage in terms of accessing new technologies and crops. For instance, male farmers are more likely to participate in training courses on how to use new machinery and on cultivation techniques in

crops that are commercially promising.

Agriculture extension staff are overwhelmingly male, making it less likely that women farmers' needs are fully taken into account in the design and delivery of services. An important factor discouraging female farmers from participating is that attendance often involves travelling

long distances and taking hours away from the family.

Yet, women farmers are very eager to learn and those who received vocational training at agricultural schools report higher productivity than those who did not.

PAID DOMESTIC WORKERS

There are three main types of domestic workers: those who live-in with their employers; those who do not live in their employers' home; and those who work as carers assisting patients with personal hygiene and eating while they are in hospital.

Live-in domestics are the most dependent on their employer. They tend to have more stable and secure earnings but also a restrictive, at times exploitative, employment relationship. They face many claims on their time outside of regular working hours from their employers.

Work as a live-out domestics tends to be more irregular and less remunerative but is also perceived as more flexible.

Hospital work can be the most intense and yet erratic of all, requiring at times to live side-by-side with a patient uninterruptedly up to 14 hours a day. The few men working as paid domestic workers are concentrated in this type of work.

Both live-in domestics and hospital carers frequently exceed the maximum of eight working hours per day stipulated by the law.

Few domestic workers have health and social insurance, and most of them, rather than their employers, pay for it. A number of domestic workers are also likely to be exposed to verbal or sexual abuse, but there appears to be reticence around these issues.

A new Decree (Decree No.27) was passed in 2014, which for the first time defines key rights for domestic workers. These includes, among others, that a written employment contracts must be signed between the domestic worker and their employer.

A survey taken only a few years before the passing of Decree No. 27 reveals that the level of precariousness for domestic workers is higher than for other informal wage workers. For instance, less than 10 per cent among them had a written contract.

Many paid domestic workers are recent migrants to the cities and hence excluded from essential health and other social services. Their opportunity for organizing is also lower than for other workers.

The new labour regulations are still little known, and institutional mechanisms to ensure their enforcement have not been as yet tested and implemented.

KEY FINDINGS

GARMENT WORKERS

The number of women working in export-oriented factories is growing. Conditions tend to be more favourable than in other female-dominated occupations; however, the picture is uneven, depending on firm ownership and structure as well as workers' specific circumstances.

In 2014, women constituted more than 65 per cent of the total labour force employed by the foreign-owned sector, where compliance with labour standards is higher than in private domestic sectors. However, these are jobs that do not offer much opportunity in terms of gaining and consolidating skills, or obtaining promotion.

The garment industry is the most long-established of all export-oriented manufacturing sectors. The vast majority of garment factories, however, still produce at the cut-make-trim end of the value chain, a simple assembly process with low value-added for the producer, and rely on imported raw materials.

Like paid domestic workers, many female garment workers are migrants from rural areas, but they are younger and tend to be better educated than either female farmers or paid domestic workers. More than half of all female garment workers are married and often have children who are under five years of age.

For garment workers who recently migrated to the cities, especially for those who have young children, problems of accommodation as well as access to health and education services can be especially severe. Workers face higher-than-average water, electricity and housing bills and struggle to find affordable and quality education and care for their children.

About half of total foreign-owned garment factories in the country are enrolled in the Better Work programme, an initiative of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to improve labour

standards and firm competitiveness in global supply chains. Better Work offers a promising model for strengthening women's rights at work. It could be used by the Government as a template for similar initiatives in wage sectors beyond the garment sector.

Data from Better Work surveys show that:

- after factories join the Better Work programme, workers report greater employment security, with the share of workers on open-ended contracts more than doubling over four years;
- opportunities for training or promotion remain limited, especially for women;
- more workers report availability of factory-based health care but continue to rate the services received as 'only fair' or 'poor';
- childcare support such as on-site crèches and kindergartens remains scarce but a few Better Work factories contribute towards childcare costs;
- overt discrimination against pregnant women and young mothers in the factories appears to be rare, but there are cases of factories that discriminate in more subtle forms, for example, by not renewing workers' contracts after they return from maternity leave (for those workers who are on short-term contracts) or transferring workers to less attractive positions (for those workers who are on indefinite term contracts);
- the benefits of Better Work go beyond increased compliance and include the development of workers' communication and life skills through participation in Performance Improvement Consultative Committees (PICCs). A number of female garment workers report that they find these skills especially useful, not only in the workplace, but also in their personal lives.

PRIORITIES FOR POLICY

- **IMPROVE THE PRODUCTIVITY AND EARNING CAPACITY OF WOMEN WHO RELY ON AGRICULTURE AS THEIR MAIN SOURCE OF LIVELIHOOD.** Greater recognition is needed of the continuing importance of agriculture in Viet Nam's economy as a source of employment and the role that a more dynamic and productive agricultural sector can play in supporting the growth of other sectors. When looking at the sheer numbers of women involved (more than 12 million, or about half of the total female labour force), and the regions where agriculture dominates (the poorest ones), it is apparent that an economic strategy supporting women farmers more proactively is crucial for achieving gender equality as well as reducing spatial and income inequality.
- **PAY PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO THE PLIGHT OF ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN AND GIRLS, WHO CONTINUE TO LAG BEHIND BOTH ETHNIC MINORITY MEN AND KINH AND CHINESE WOMEN IN ACCESSING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES.** Given that the vast majority of ethnic minority women work in agriculture, this issue is covered under the above recommendation, but policy action must go even further. Innovative solutions need to ensure that public services and resources reach ethnic minority areas more effectively and are specifically tailored to the problems that women and girls face in these communities in terms of health, education and housework burdens.
- **STRENGTHEN WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS** by increasing the quantity and quality of legal services offered to rural women and promoting outreach programmes that include men as well as women, with special attention to ethnic minority communities.
- **MAKE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES MORE GENDER-SENSITIVE** and easier to attend by: ensuring that the training is organized in places and at times that are compatible with rural women's caring responsibilities; increasing the number of female extension services; and using participatory methods tailored to the needs of farmers with no formal education.
- **PROMOTE AN INTEGRATED PACKAGE OF SERVICES FOR WOMEN FARMERS.** In addition to simple technical skills in cultivation methods, this should also include credit, market facilitation, business skills and information. Because women farmers face biases in multiple domains and gender-based constraints in access to resources are mutually interdependent, only comprehensive agricultural policies and public support to rural areas can enable them to improve the productivity of both their labour and their land and to gain greater autonomy. More effective coordination between government departments and other relevant stakeholders is required to achieve this goal.
- **ENSURE THAT SMALL-SCALE WOMEN FARMERS ARE NOT LEFT BEHIND** in efforts to promote contract farming in high value products and international agricultural value chains.
- **FACILITATE WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JOBS AND SECTORS THAT ARE NOT TRADITIONALLY ASSOCIATED WITH FEMALE CHARACTERISTICS.** Although increasingly more women are gaining access to relatively more secure wage jobs, gender segregation in the labour market remains a significant concern. The Government must increase support to the development of non-traditional skills by enabling women to participate in high quality training and offering specialization in technical fields. This would not only expand the range of economic options available to women, but also increase their ability to rise up through the occupational hierarchy. Measures are also needed to tackle persistent gender stereotyping in the workplace and discriminatory practices from employers.

- **ADDRESS THE LACK OF TECHNICAL SKILLS OF FEMALE WAGE WORKERS.** Upgrading skills of the labour force is recognized as essential to meet the challenge of competing in the global economy. It is crucial that women workers are included in this policy agenda through the provision of specialized training that meets their needs in different sectors and occupations, and contributes to widen their choice for paid employment. The need to address gender gaps in training opportunities is all the more urgent because women's share of the working population with technical qualifications has fallen while that of men has risen since 2004.
- **IMPROVE THE PROVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES SUCH AS HEALTH, EDUCATION AND CARE** in order to support the well-being and productivity of working women in urban areas, paying special attention to the women workers who are particularly vulnerable because they have recently migrated to the cities and have young children.
- **IMPROVE COMPLIANCE WITH VIET NAM'S LABOUR LAWS.** These laws are progressive and recognize women and men workers as equal, but they need to be better implemented. With regard to manufacturing, the Government should play a key role in scaling up and extending Better Work-type programmes and make labour inspections more systematic, both across sectors and factories other than the foreign-owned ones. With regard to paid domestic work, the Government should promote the production of model contracts for domestic workers and develop innovative means for monitoring their hours of work.
- **ENHANCE THE CAPACITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS** to offer support on wider legal and social issues to workers and mobilize against gender discriminatory practices.

REDUCING AND REDISTRIBUTING UNPAID DOMESTIC WORK AND CARE AS A CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE

Promoting the substantive realization of women's economic rights and improving their access to secure paid jobs not only depends on labour market, agricultural and educational policies, but also depends critically on the range of social services and infrastructure that the Government makes available to women workers to support their families' and their own well-being. Redressing women's socio-economic disadvantage requires a reorganization of unpaid care and domestic work to prevent them from continuing to bear a disproportionate responsibility for its provision and, as a result, from suffering in terms of their own health and productive capacity.

Viet Nam's public expenditure on health and education in the aggregate is at a reasonable level by regional standards, but there is concern over whether at present public resources are allocated equitably and basic services manage to meet the needs of those women and girls that need them the most. The Government can take several steps to allocate public resources more effectively and ensure that care responsibilities are shared more equally between institutions and between women and men, through social services and other forms of public support. The objective of reducing and redistributing unpaid domestic work and care must be considered across the board and therefore be built into the design and implementation of the widest range of sectoral interventions. It must

be also fully integrated in the overall formulation of macro-economic policies such as decisions on public expenditure, taxation and trade policies.

Viet Nam's National Strategy for Gender Equality 2011-2020 includes a target to "reduce women's time involvement in household duties by two times by 2015 and 1.5 times by 2020 as compared to men's". However, the lack, to date, of a nationally representative time use survey and other relevant indicators makes it difficult to identify inequalities in the distribution of housework, design appropriate policy measures and monitor progress on this target. In addition to improving data collection, there is also an urgent need to develop analytical frameworks and tools for use in relevant ministries that enable a better understanding of the links between unpaid domestic work and various components of economic policies

The study has selectively examined two policy areas, infrastructure investment in rural water (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, or WASH) and the provision of ECEC, in order to assess the extent to which gender equality concerns are currently integrated in such policies, paying special attention to measures that have the potential to reduce and redistribute the burden of unpaid domestic work and care.

KEY FINDINGS

ARE CURRENT WASH POLICIES INFORMED BY A CONCERN TO REDUCE UNPAID DOMESTIC WORK?

- Progress has been made in improving WASH infrastructure in the aggregate (i.e. Millennium Development Goal 7 target C of halving by 2015 the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, has been met), but differences between regions and between rural and urban areas are rising rather than declining.
- Official policy documents acknowledge gender equality and social inclusion only as general goals.
- Analytical frameworks and specific indicators to inform design and monitoring of appropriate interventions are lacking.
- Transparent mechanisms to ensure better accessibility and affordability of water services are lacking.
- To date, mainstreaming gender issues in WASH policies is mostly understood as ensuring women's equal numerical participation in WASH committees. Little attention is given to reducing unpaid work as an objective per se.

ARE CURRENT ECEC POLICIES INFORMED BY A CONCERN TO REDUCE UNPAID DOMESTIC WORK?

- Children's attendance in rural areas and among poor households is especially low. Parents often face high out-of-pocket expenses to compensate for otherwise limited facilities and services.
- Services for children under three are almost non-existent.
- There have been a few recent initiatives for young children of mothers working in industrial parks but mostly in the form of subsidized private centres.
- Expansion of good quality public ECEC services could contribute to directly create jobs for women, but teachers in pre-school are currently poorly paid.
- Transparent mechanisms to ensure better accessibility and affordability of ECEC services appear not to be in place.

PRIORITIES FOR POLICY

PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN GENERAL

- **FULLY RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE** for equalizing responsibility for unpaid domestic work and promoting women's ability to participate in paid work, decision-making and training. Greater investment in social infrastructure will pay off by stimulating long-term growth and raising economy-wide productivity, and is also likely to generate more jobs for women.
- **SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPREHENSIVE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS** that can spell out the full range of effects from public investment to various dimensions of gender inequality. This will help to ground policy design in rigorous analysis and will also be essential for the choice of indicators needed in monitoring and implementation.
- **REGULARLY INCORPORATE GENDER STATISTICS INTO GOVERNMENT PLANNING AND BUDGETING** documents at the national level and use them to monitor the implementation of specific projects on the ground. Offer training sessions on gender-responsive budgeting to officers from various ministries, including the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

SPECIFIC TO WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

- **ENCOURAGE WOMEN'S SUBSTANTIVE PARTICIPATION IN WASH COMMITTEES** by: scheduling WASH meetings at times that are compatible with women's household responsibilities; providing childcare assistance during meetings; and providing female participants with training in negotiating skills or other relevant skills.
- **REGULARLY PERFORM MULTI-STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS** including women and women's organizations in order to understand the role of water policies and their effects on women and girls.
- **DEVELOP THE TECHNICAL CAPACITY** for routinely undertaking gender impact assessments to monitor differential effects on women and men of water supply projects that fully integrate consideration of time savings in the calculations of costs and benefits of WASH interventions.



SPECIFIC TO EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE (ECEC)

- **EXTEND CHILDCARE PROGRAMMES** for children under 18 months beyond a few industrial zones only and to serve also rural areas, where the majority of poor women and children live and work.
- **PROMOTE PUBLIC ECEC INITIATIVES TO SPECIFICALLY SUPPORT WORKING MOTHERS FROM LOW-INCOME GROUPS**, ideally free of charge. These initiatives should aim to benefit both wage workers and the self-employed.
- **IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS AND SALARIES OF ECEC STAFF.**
- **PROMOTE MORE PUBLICLY PROVIDED ECEC SERVICES** and strengthen monitoring of compliance in private ECEC arrangements.

END NOTES

- I UN Women, 2015; Elson and Jain, 2011.
- II Tejani and Millberg, 2016; Kucera and Tejani, 2014.
- III Braunstein, 2015.
- IV UN Women, 2015.
- V UNDP, 2016.
- VI Ibid.

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