

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT IN URBAN VIETNAM
A Case Study of Marketplace Sellers in Ho Chi Minh City

by

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ABSTRACT

Vietnam is currently in a volatile transition period. The country has been experiencing rapid economic growth and development since the introduction of its market-oriented renovation policies in 1986. The urban areas in Vietnam, which are absorbing migrants in increasing numbers, are under pressure to provide housing, urban services, and jobs. Combating high rates of unemployment is only one of the challenges facing Vietnam today. This paper is concerned with how Vietnam's economic renovation policies are influencing job opportunities for urban women. In particular, the problem addressed in this document pertains to small-scale business and micro-enterprise opportunities for women.

Women working in urban marketplaces in Ho Chi Minh City were interviewed to collect information on their employment histories and personal profiles as self-employed people. Because they are working in the private sector during times of economic transition, women who are self-employed in Vietnam represent a creative and progressive group within the Vietnamese labor force. Furthermore, women marketplace sellers have geared their income generation to jobs outside the wage earning sector, where discrimination in hiring and pay is common. Women in Vietnam are critical beneficiaries of employment and training programs because they face more difficulties in finding stable forms of employment than men.

Conclusions drawn from this study find that small-scale business opportunities offer women a form of income generation that is obtainable to persons of all levels of education, ages, and personal

background. Moreover, the income generated by marketplace sellers contributes significantly to urban households and is capable of withstanding turbulent economic. Declining health and education subsidies are affecting women and girls of school ages, which should be closely so that women do not lose ground in the labor force in years to come.

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CHAPTER 1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

INTRODUCTION

The process of urban growth in developing countries plays a major economic role in the development of these countries. Urban growth is often associated with challenges to create viable employment opportunities for the rapidly growing populations. In light of this, the important role of self-employment is a component of macro economic development. The ubiquitous nature of self-employment in rapidly expanding urban areas, some of which involve informal sector jobs, is particularly relevant in socialist economies undergoing transformation to market-oriented economies. The dynamic role of economic activity within urban areas has profound implications for planners and policy makers.

Vietnam has been experiencing extremely rapid growth in all sectors of its economy. In 1986, the government adopted a market-oriented economic renovation policy (*doi moi*), which has led to a restructuring of the national economy. Since the end of the 1980's, these economic liberalization policies have created more favorable conditions for households wishing to participate in free market activities. Urban women, like rural women, are faced with challenges to evolve strategies to meet their household demands and often partake in self-employed forms of work.

What constitutes *self-employment* can be difficult to define, especially among low income people. Self-employment falls into both the formal sector, i.e., jobs which are legally registered and are subject to paying taxes on income, and the informal sector, which are unregistered jobs operating

outside legal tax collection systems. Self-employment does not only include large and small businesses and household enterprises, but also agricultural production and people working their own land. In Vietnam's Living Standards Survey (1994) self-employment is defined as follows:

Self-employment consists of farm and non-farm activities. Self-employment is defined for a household member as one of two things: i) to work any job for his/her benefit including agricultural production on land owned, managed by the individual or on the land he/she has the right to use; or non-farm business fully/partly owned by this member of household, ii) to work for his/her household but is not paid for this work in the form of wage or salary (VLSS, 1994:3).

The type of self-employment selected for analysis in Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) for the purpose of this study is limited to activities of female stall owners/traders in a marketplace. These are jobs in which an individual (1) is the sole owner/manager of the business, and (2) does not take a salary from anyone, but rather lives off her own daily earnings.

The issue of self-employment for women merits investigation in Vietnam for several reasons. First, the high ratio of women to men existing in post-war Vietnam presents a unique environment where many women have been participating actively for years in income generation for themselves and their families. Gender imbalances from the Vietnam War and the Second World War have drastically reduced the sex ratio in the country. In 1979 the total of females exceeded that of males by 1.6 million (there were 94.2 men for every 100 women) making it one of the lowest in the world (Research Center for Gender and Development, 1995). Peaceful years following the Vietnam War have gradually balanced the sex ratio but the effects of this abnormality in the past resonates in women's active and tenacious roles in carrying their families through hardship.

Second, the economic renovations in Vietnam that have been taking place since 1986 have given urban dwellers new opportunities to initiate their own economic ventures. Previously people did not have equal rights to land or to engage in business ventures. Today, constitutional rights to private enterprise activity are available to everyone in Vietnam, including women. Economic opportunities for women in some fields have been blocked by discrimination and family responsibilities but with a changing national system women have been turning to self-employment as a way to increase their economic independence, and gain more autonomy for themselves in a traditionally patriarchal society.

Third, women have both productive and reproductive roles in Vietnamese society which demand their time and energy. The gender roles of women involve i) reproduction/child-rearing, ii) production (often as secondary income earners), and iii) community-management work, which is related to the state of housing and basic services (Moser, 1989). The time women devote to the three main roles they assume makes wage earning employment more difficult to incorporate and the flexibility of self-employment more attractive.

A fourth reason for the importance of self-employment opportunities is the competitiveness of wage earning jobs and the insufficient supply of wage positions in a labor excess country like Vietnam. Women tend to have lower education and skill levels than men. The gender roles of women in Vietnamese society and the influence of a family hierarchy, places the importance of educating the male children before the female children, and assumes that a wife's education not exceed her husband's (Research Center for Gender and Development, 1995). Confucianism, incorporates the

beliefs that men are superior to women in many ways. The experience of Confucian values in the South of Vietnam has been less intense than in the North, because the practice spread from China, but the social and economic changes that women have experienced over time have been fundamental to the changes in Vietnamese women's status and the transition from a matriarchy to patriarchy (Frenier and Mancin, 1996). One impact of gender biased education trend is that it leaves women less educated than men and thus less competitive in the workforce in later years. Not every family follows these customs, but the data on education levels does depict educational differences between boys and girls. Data on girls show a high drop out rate by the time they reach secondary school: in the 5-9 age group there was little difference between males and females in school attendance (64.4% males and 63.9 % females) but the proportion falls substantially at the age of 15-19 (29.1% males and 20.1% females) enrolled.

Lastly, the issue of financing is a primary component of business start-up and business expansion. Women are inhibited by a struggle for capital. Accessing credit is a main barrier for women everywhere, but in Vietnam it is especially problematic because the banking infrastructure is underdeveloped. The lack of a sufficient banking system to serve the needs of Vietnamese society makes formal borrowing inefficient and exclusive.

GENERAL OVERVIEW: COUNTRY DESCRIPTION

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is a Southeast Asian country slightly smaller than the state of California and is shaped like an elongated "s" along its north-south axis (Jamieson, 1993:3). It has an extensive coastline along the South China Sea, as well as mountains that span the central region

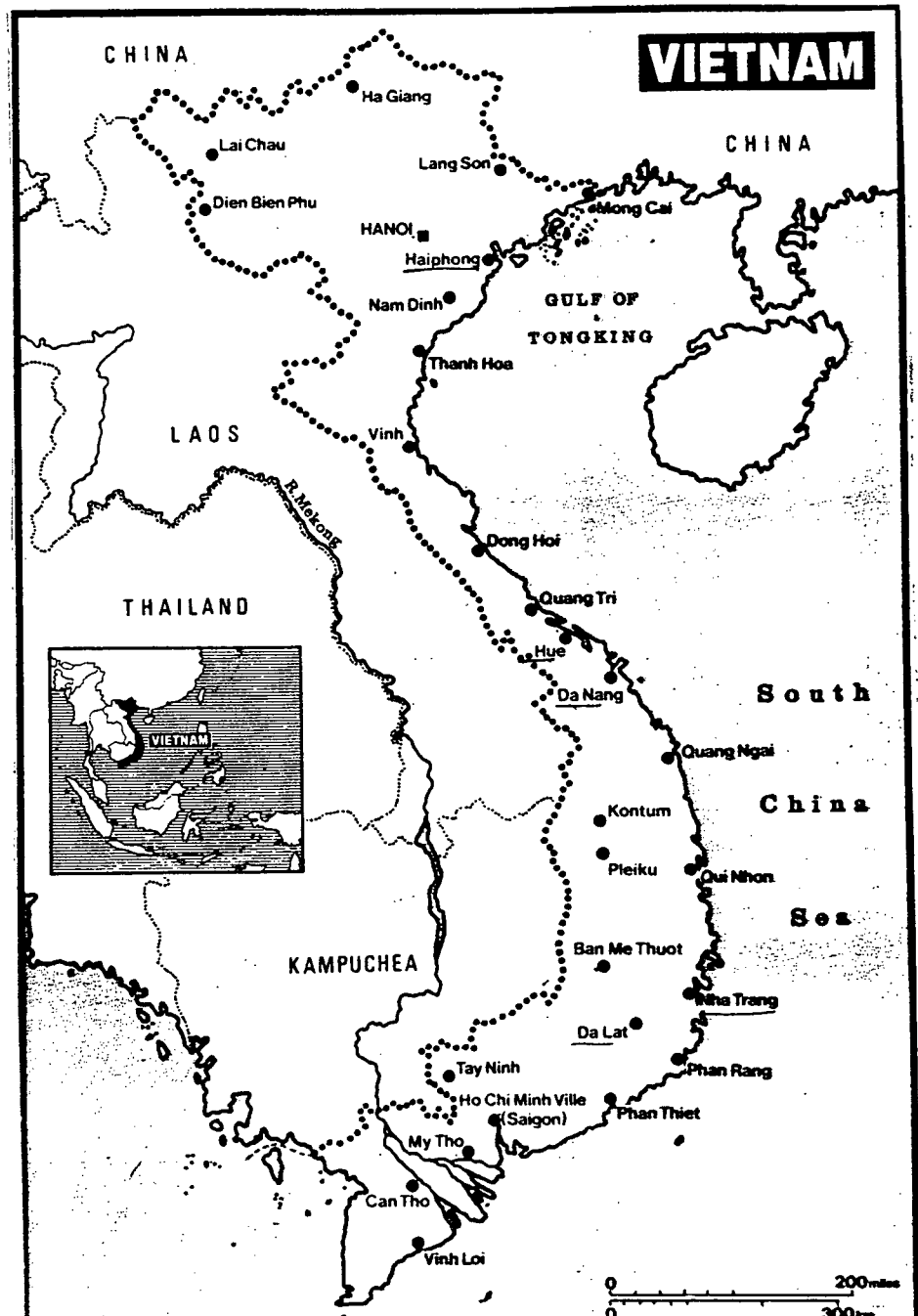
of the country and the northwestern area between Laos and China. The most densely populated geographic areas are the two deltas: the Red River Delta in the north, and the Mekong Delta in the south. These delta regions are the bread baskets of Vietnam that provide fertile land for cultivation, naturally attracting the largest populations. Vietnam has an estimated population of 74 million people and a total land area of 330,000 square kilometers making it one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The long coastline of Vietnam, anchored by concentrations of people to the north (around Hanoi) and to the south (around Ho Chi Minh City) is often compared metaphorically to a traditional Vietnamese shoulder basket used to carry heavy loads by balancing two baskets on the ends of a pole and hoisting it over one's shoulders.

There are 53 provinces in Vietnam, approximately 500 districts, and approximately 10,000 communes (UNDP, 1995: 8). Vietnam's economy is dependent on agriculture and natural resources for both domestic consumption and export. In 1994, eighty percent of the population was still living mainly on agricultural production (Country Report, 1995). Infrastructure in Vietnam is in poor condition, especially outside the main urban areas, but overall levels of education and health care are exceptional for a country with its degree of poverty. Literacy rates are high for both men and women (90 percent of the population is literate) and mortality rates are comparable to industrialized countries (38/1000 for Vietnamese children age one) (Country Report, 1995).

Although Vietnam's economic renovation policies look promising, Vietnam is still an incredibly poor country by international standards. Fifty-one percent of the Vietnamese population is classified as poor and twenty-five percent cannot meet their basic daily caloric requirements. The World

Bank's Poverty Assessment Report conducted in 1995 puts the poverty line (national average) at 1,090 thousand Dong per person per year, about \$99 United States Dollars (USD). Vietnam's Country Report to the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) put the average income per capita at 220 USD. The income quotes vary, but both reports agree that the national average is higher per capita in cities where incomes are generally higher. The average income in Ho Chi Minh City is higher than the national average: approximately \$810 USD per capita in 1994. (Du, 1995: 5)

Figure 1 Country Map of Vietnam (Asia Pacific Review 1991/1992: 233)



Vietnam's urban sector

The urban sector is vital to economic development in Vietnam. The urban sector in Vietnam currently accounts for a population of about 21 million or 30 percent of the national total, and it is expected to grow to 35 percent by the year 2010 (UNDP, 1996). The urban economy is generating 60 percent of national revenues and 40 percent of expenditures, and providing the focus for private capital flows. The two main urban centers (Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi) together account for 50 percent of foreign direct investments (UNDP, 1996).

Ho Chi Minh City is the largest urban area in Vietnam in terms of population, land area, and economic activity. The government previously planned a population cap of 5 million for Ho Chi Minh City, but that will soon be exceeded. Population estimates, including illegal migrants/unregistered peoples (those living without legal residence in Ho Chi Minh City), are currently estimated around 6-7 million. If the population of Ho Chi Minh City factors in the unregistered population, the planned cap of 5 million is already exceeded (UNDP, 1996). Problems arising from the pace of urbanization are difficult to confront. Slum and squatter areas are recorded to hold a minimum of 230,000 people in Ho Chi Minh City, and although Ho Chi Minh City has the best service coverage in Vietnam, twenty percent of households still lack direct access to piped water supply and water-borne sanitation.

Employment in urban areas is becoming more complicated with the recent urbanization trends. Urbanization is increasing with Vietnam's transition to a market economy. The landscape is being influenced by the rapid and unregulated conversion of agricultural land, the densification of villages

outside urban areas, and the overcrowding of the inner cities as commercial urban renewal displaces former residents. Rural to urban migration is continuing at alarming rates. The poor living in cities tend to work for other people in short term jobs requiring little skill, or they are self-employed, often working in unregistered jobs such as selling goods or services on the streets. The growing sex industry is also of concern, attracting young girls from the countryside into urban prostitution. Urban incomes are often worthwhile for rural migrants, but ultimately jobs are unsecure, often dangerous, and housing conditions are generally temporary because the migrants do not have legal resident status in the city.

Women in Vietnam

Women have always been a dynamic and visible part of Vietnamese society. Repeated wars and economic hardship have forced women to work actively in the labor force with men, or in the absence of men, to support themselves and their families. In 1994, women accounted for 51.48 percent of the total population and 52 percent of the work force (Country Report, March 1995).

Vietnamese women are praised for defending the country in times of war and rebuilding it in times of peace. War heroines like Bui Thi Xuan and the Trung Sisters (40 A.D.) rode elephants into battle to defend their villages against attacks by the Chinese. These famous heroines are known by every school child in Vietnam today for their bravery and commitment. During the French occupation of Vietnam, women joined the revolutionary movement and were subsequently invited to attend public lectures at a short-lived, but influential, school in Hanoi (Tetreault, 1996:38). During the revolutionary movement, Vietnamese intellectuals used gender discussions to exemplify and analyze

conditions in Vietnam under colonialism to the point where debates on women became a main topic for arguing against colonialism outright. Vietnamese revolutionaries appealed directly to women to participate in the struggle to liberate Vietnam from French occupation, promising them equal political, social, and economic rights under a new regime.

The Women's Union was a spin off of the women's liberation movement that coincided with the revolutionary goals of the time. Founded in 1930, the Women's Union has been a powerful organization in Vietnam through its active involvement in socioeconomic development and politics. It was established under the auspices of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) and was one of the functional organizations created to build a solid base for the ICP. This mass organization was a pivotal force in achieving revolutionary goals and in mobilizing women to participate in the cause along side men. The Women's Union had organized members at every level of society from the village to the highest levels of government. Women became policy making members of Ho Chi Minh's united front coalition, the Viet Minh, and women who previously had no rights to land were given a share in land in the areas taken over by the revolutionary movement (Tetreault, 1996). Ho Chi Minh advocated repeated for equality for women in his political efforts.

Women in Vietnam have been active, resilient, and politically aware during the centuries of repeated wars and hardship. The Women's Union and its political and social importance have endured since its establishment under the ICP. Its focus in modern day society has changed since its inception, but its role in society and politics has not declined. The Women's Union today is organized from the central level of government and has a membership of over 11 million. It acts as an intermediary for

many local and national projects in both urban and rural areas. Its involvement today is international through partnerships in local projects like the United Nation's (UNFPA) national population and gender program currently in operation in Vietnam. The Women's Union has been paramount in distributing the family planning and educational programs at the village level.¹ The Women's Union is also active in smaller projects initiated by foreign aid organizations, in addition to its commitment to the Vietnamese Government and its agenda.

Women in Vietnam are in the midst of changing times that offer new opportunities and volatile gender driven challenges. This study is interested in how women are fitting into the past decade of rapid industrialization and development vis-à-vis small-scale private sector business.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam has *doi moi* encouraged more small-scale business and micro-enterprise opportunities for women? What is the importance of this form of income generation for urban households?

The design of this study was centered around two main goals: (1) to look at women's employment history since economic renovations were implemented in order to gauge any shifts into this sector by women and to inquire about business linkages and marketplace strategies and (2) to look at what role self-employed women's income play in their contribution to their overall household income. The

¹ There are a number of reports on population and family planning projects. See *Vietnam - Population Communication Sector Analysis: Report of Mission Undertaken on Behalf of the United Nations Population Fund from 16 February to 5 March, 1995* for an overview. By Anamaria Decock, FAO Rome.

direction taken to achieve the two-fold purpose of this study: First, the study concentrated on different aspects of the jobs, namely:

- the degree of autonomy the women have in decision-making and accounting
- the amount of time spent each day in both preparation and actual selling
- how they access credit and capital for small-scale business
- the business links used within the city and beyond; and
- satisfaction and concerns related to their jobs and future.

Second, it examined the role of women in the household economy in Ho Chi Minh City by looking at the household composition of self-employed women and evaluating the importance of that income to the household. By knowing the number of members within the household, the ages, gender, education levels, and current employment of those members contributing to the household economy, the woman's economic contribution can be ranked. In light of this information, the importance of self-employment (be it a formally registered shop or an informal trader) to Vietnamese households can be inferred.

RATIONALE

The rationale for conducting research in Vietnam regarding women, employment and economic reform is embedded in the idea that realizing the economic and social contributions of women will be beneficial to future macroeconomic stabilization policies. Massive unemployment, poverty, and changes in national policy are affecting everyone in Vietnam. How women are faring and devising ways to remain flexible during this time is an important component of development.

The division of labor in Vietnam is apparent in certain jobs. The marketplace, where many stall owners converge to sell goods and services to customers, is largely feminized in Vietnam. It is also a place where the effects of capitalism and free market forces are active. The marketplace has been an economic focal point from the earliest times. Women's participation in this system is significant to the economic livelihood of their households, the urban economy, and the national economy. For these reasons, this study is devoted to women in Vietnam and their role in economic development vis-à-vis self-employment.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this study began in Vancouver, Canada in 1995 with a partial review of the literature and the development of a survey questionnaire to be administered in Ho Chi Minh City in the Spring of 1996. The areas of literature reviewed before doing the field work in Vietnam included: economies undergoing economic transition from central to free market; the household and the household economy; women and economic development, and a background of Vietnam's social, political and economic history. The survey questionnaire was refined a number of times at the University of British Columbia and then again with input from academics from the Institute of Social Sciences in Ho Chi Minh City (ISSHO).

Activities carried out during the field work in Ho Chi Minh City

The field work in Ho Chi Minh City began with a series of meetings with Professor Vinh at ISSHO to discuss the project and its execution. Geographical locations were a primary consideration because Ho Chi Minh City is large and diverse. Discussions over which locations and marketplaces

should be used for surveying continued for a number of weeks. The economic profiles of the districts; the history of districts within Ho Chi Minh City; and the ethnic make up of different districts were all considered. In addition, sociologists working at ISSHO, were approached in order to utilize their knowledge of the city and Vietnamese social issues. Professor Vinh was very helpful in bringing to my attention local papers and documents on urban issues related to Vietnam.

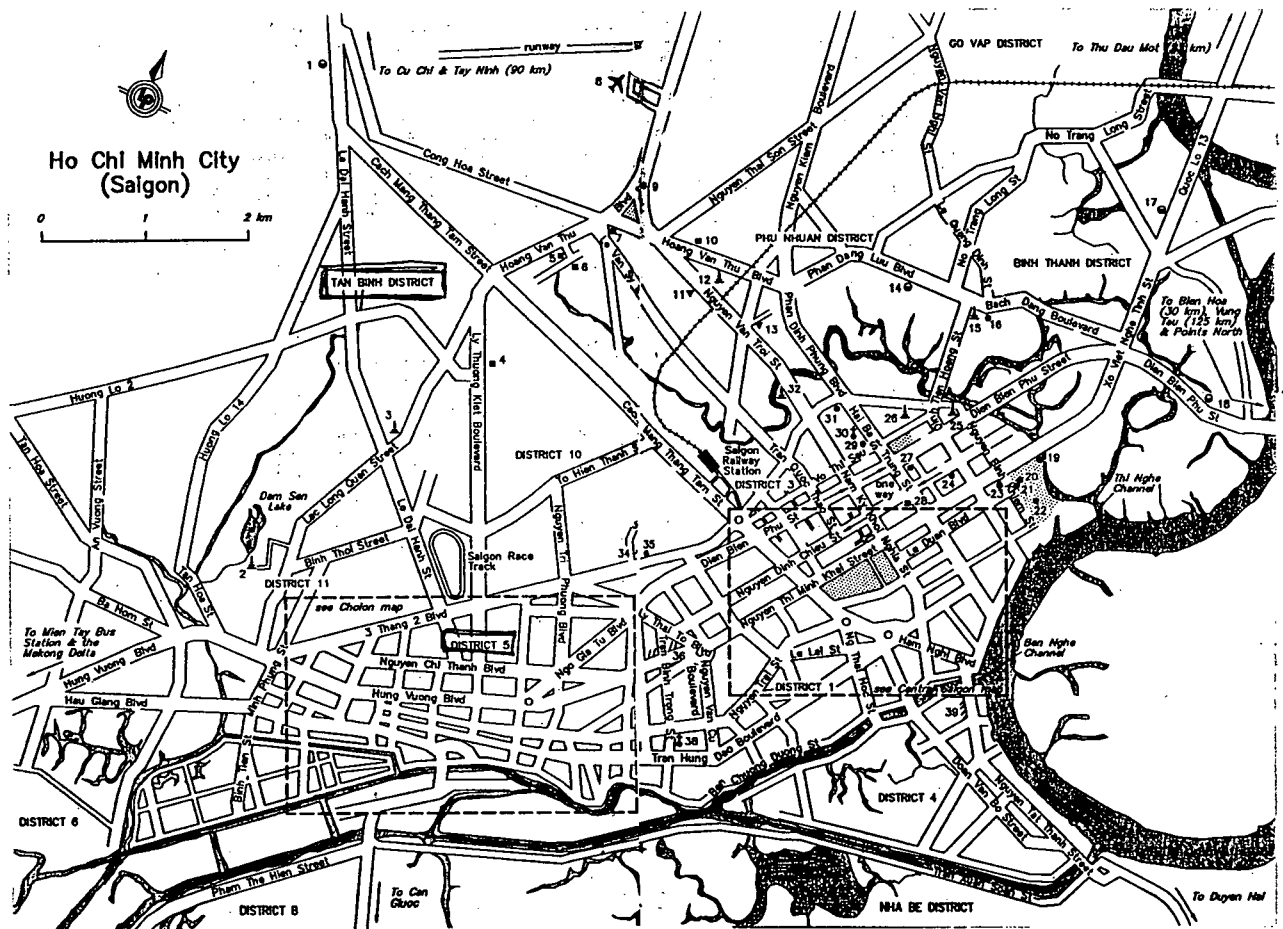
Districts

Ho Chi Minh City was known as Saigon until the time of its renaming after the end of the Vietnam War. Saigon was always a vibrant city for trade and commerce. In its early development, Saigon grew geographically and economically with a sister city named Cholon. Eventually Saigon incorporated Cholon into a larger city plan. Today the area of Cholon is part of district 5 and commonly referred to as the "Chinatown" of Ho Chi Minh City. For several reasons, one of the marketplaces chosen for interviews in this study was located in district 5. The history of trade and commerce in Saigon indicates the important role of the area called Cholon in the urban economy over the past few centuries. The force behind the economic development of Saigon is said to be the ethnic Chinese. Ethnic Chinese, called *Hoa*, are people who permanently reside in Vietnam but identify themselves as ethnically Chinese regardless of citizenship (Amer, 1996). They began to settle in the Saigon area in the seventeenth century and were not too concerned with agriculture, but rather with trade. The Chinese are credited with establishing a strong and respected trading network that still accesses and distributes goods from around the world into what is today, Ho Chi Minh City. Much of the trade in Cholon is wholesale.

Cholon served as a warehouse for all of Indochina. It was, and still is, home to professional smugglers who use a sophisticated underground network of suppliers. During the American embargo on trade, buyers went to Cholon to find brand name goods like Stanley, John Deere, Kohler and American Standard (Rohwer, 1995:227). The Cholon area in Ho Chi Minh City is unique because of the density of the area, the historically high representation of ethnic Chinese people who live there, and the long-standing foothold it has had in trade and commerce in the region.

In contrast to this, Tan Binh district in the northwest quadrant of the city was also chosen for interviews. Tan Binh district represents a growing area with a low density and a relatively high median income. There is an increasing amount of new economic development in Tan Binh district: sports clubs, hotels, a large expo center, expatriate villas and modern houses. The summer of 1996 saw the grand opening of a Singaporean development called SuperBowl, a giant entertainment center containing bowling alleys, discos, shops and a food court. The city airport is in Tan Binh district as well which influences the development of upscale hotels and restaurants in the immediate area. A marketplace in Tan Binh district was chosen in order to provide contrast with the old, dense, and ethnic Chinese character of Cholon (District 5).

Figure 2 Map of Districts in Ho Chi Minh City (Robinson & Storey, 1993:162-163)



Marketplaces

In addition to choosing two different districts in the city, two different types of marketplaces were chosen for comparative purposes. A small street market, named *Phung Hung Market*, located in District 5 was chosen to represent the small-scale side of the business spectrum. It profiles vendors who earn a relatively low profit, pay minimal rents for their stalls, have short term stall leases, and invest a relatively nominal amount of capital in their businesses. This particular marketplace is located in a narrow, internal street that bisects two larger streets: Hung Vuong Street and Nguyen

Trai Street. The interviews conducted in this market were with venders of both ethnic Chinese (*Hoa* people) and ethnic Vietnamese (*Viet* people) background.

Although the total number of ethnic Chinese in the city of Ho Chi Minh as a whole is quite small, district 5 has the highest concentration. It was estimated in 1991 that Cholon's ethnic Chinese controlled at least two-thirds of the small-scale industrial sector and one-third of the commercial activities in Ho Chi Minh City, even though they comprise only about 10 percent of the city's total population.² Because of these factors, an equal sample of ethnic Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese were sampled from the Phung Hung market.

The other marketplace, *Tan Binh Market*, is an indoor market in the fast growing district of Tan Binh. Not only is it a closed market, it was built by the government and houses over 2,000 stalls. It was chosen as a representative of the larger-scale end of business operation by marketplace women. In this market higher taxes and rents must be paid to operate a business, but security and other amenities are provided. Tan Binh Market was also chosen because part of this market was a state owned trade company. Only in 1995 was this trade company, which owned 115 stalls within the marketplace, privatized. The trade company still exists but occupies only a small area on the first floor. When the trade company was being privatized, the women working there were offered the chance to rent a stall of their own in the market and to continue trading for themselves. Therefore, some of the women interviewed were expected to have experience in the State sector before crossing over to the private sector.

² Murray Hiebert. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 1 August 1991. (pg 24-25)

Local partnership and collaboration

While the most appropriate districts and marketplaces were being chosen, the survey questionnaire to be administered continued to be revised. Each question was reviewed and subsequently evaluated by four female sociologists from ISSHO. As a group we reviewed the survey question by question so that I could get their input on strengths and weaknesses in the questionnaire within the Vietnamese cultural setting and any nuances in the marketplace environment that I was unaware of. Professor Vinh suggested one of these sociologist, Mrs. Ngo Thi Kim Dung, for me to meet and collaborate with in the field collection. Mrs. Dung became a vital partner in Ho Chi Minh City because of her academic ability and familiarity with the city.

The delicate nature of the marketplace setting makes interviewing a complicated matter. Approval to enter the marketplace must be given by the market managers, and the People's Committee at the district level must approve any research or surveys done in the area. Once inside the marketplace, we expected the women to feel suspicious of the interviewers. It would be natural for the women in this setting, as well as the market managers, to be wary of people asking questions about taxes or money, so this information was kept to a minimum. It was established from the beginning that the delicate nature of approaching these women required all interviews to be prefaced with a clear explanation of who we were and our academic affiliation, our purpose for interviewing, and what we intended to do with the information gathered.

The last problem to be tackled was the conspicuousness of foreigners in Vietnam. Vietnam has been largely closed to international influences for the last twenty years and is surprisingly homogeneous

as a result. Vietnamese people are friendly and curious about foreigners, which can lead to crowds forming, particularly in dense marketplace settings. This was the experience of interviews conducted in 1995 in district 8 by a group of Canadian students, of which I was a member. Thus, we were concerned about how my influence, as a Caucasian foreign women, could alter or intimidate a person being interviewed if crowds were to form. The naturalness and focus on the survey questionnaire would be lost and the pace of interviews would have to be broken. Ultimately, I made the decision to not attend the interviews but to hire the four sociologists from ISSHO to do the actual interviews and to meet with them afterwards to collect the surveys and discuss their progress for the day. The process took approximately two weeks with the four women interviewing together in the marketplaces for an hour or two a day. The efficiency of the interviewing was heightened and the inconspicuousness of the study was maximized, creating the most comfortable environment for the seller to answer the questionnaire with the greatest degree of honesty and frankness.

One on one interviews with 105 self-employed women constituted the bulk of the data collection.

The survey questions were designed around three points: (i) the woman's demographic and employment history, (ii) her level of autonomy in business and business linkages, and (iii) the composition of her household. Open ended questions were included at the end about overall satisfaction in doing business in Ho Chi Minh City, and questions about her greatest concerns - in the present and for the future.

External interviews were conducted in addition to those with the market sellers. A different survey of questions was asked of the market managers in Tan Binh market to get more information about

tax structures and administration. Gender issues in Vietnam and ideas about the effects of *doi moi* were explored by interviewing relevant local academics in Ho Chi Minh City, local non-governmental organizations and economic institutions. These interviews were not intended as statistically significant data, but rather as general ideas from professionals working in-country.

Limitations

The most obvious limitation of this study was the fact that I had limited knowledge of the Vietnamese language. The language barrier affected the survey, my relationship with the sociologists from ISSHO, and the interviewing process. I was unable to understand the responses of the women being interviewed in full, I had to rely on the interviewers to note any external information on the survey forms that the women may disclose. The survey questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese and had to be revised several times just to get the translation most suitable to what I wanted the questions to ask. Pierre To, a graduate student at UBC and a friend of mine who was involved in research in Ho Chi Minh City in 1996, was instrumental in helping with this process. Mr. To is ethnic Vietnamese, but has been a Canadian citizen for approximately 20 years. As a UBC planning student, he was quick to understand what I wanted to relay in English and gave me alternative Vietnamese wordings to choose from in translating the questions.

Second, communicating with the four sociologists was also limited in several ways. My remedial knowledge of Vietnamese was not enough to discuss complex issues. Although Ms. Dung's ability in English was quite good, the other three sociologists had less skill and relied on Ms. Dung to

explain matters again in Vietnamese for more clarity. There is bound to be something lost at times when working through translation.

Lastly, our cultural differences may have created some limitations. My American background and their Vietnamese background was not outwardly a problem, but should be taken into consideration when striving for full understanding of one another. Each one was married with children, whereas I am single and without children. I was younger than the sociologists I worked with and the difference in age in the Asian culture could affected my role as the manager of the study, although I did not feel my authority was directly questioned.

SUMMARY

Chapter one establishes the premise for studying women in urban marketplaces in Vietnam. The following two chapters will establish the contextual foundation for viewing the issue of self-employment for women in Vietnam, and some of the literature surrounding women and development. Chapter two is devoted to the larger picture of Vietnam. The framing issues that are discussed in chapter two include: the economic transition Vietnam is currently undergoing; employment problems in Vietnam; women's representation in the labor force; the recent expansion of the private sector in Vietnam; and self-employment and small-scale enterprise development.

Chapter three highlights some of the literature surrounding women and employment strategies. The literature review begins by establishing the relationship between gender and economics. The case of Vietnam is examined more intimately following the review of international literature on women and

economic development. Literature on the household and women's role in family, household and community are reflected back on the importance of economic opportunity.

Chapter four is devoted to the research study and findings. Information gathered in interviews with marketplace sellers is analyzed in part 1, followed by interview information gathered from managers and local professionals in part 2. The final chapter concludes the thesis paper and offers policy suggestions.

CHAPTER 2 CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

The issues of women and self-employment strategies in Vietnam are observed in the context of larger national issues. The contextual framework for this study is established in this chapter around the following national issues: Vietnam's economic reforms; the volatile situation of national employment and the position of women within it; and the expansion of the private sector, which functions as an entry point for women to gain more economic independence and stability within Vietnam's changing economic system.

ECONOMIES IN TRANSITION

Vietnam is undergoing a process of economic transition. The move to transform the economy is part of a host of socialist countries in both Europe and Asia that are introducing open-market characteristics into command economies. Socialist economies undergoing a process of transition are of interest to both public policy makers and private sector leaders. Macroeconomic stability is the long-term goal of any economy. The basic issues facing transitional socialist economies include: price reforms, enterprise and financial sector reforms, and institutional changes relating to the role of government. The obstacles include: an acute shortage of capital, weak institutions, unemployment, and "costly remnants of the past systems" (World Bank, 1992).

Vietnam is one of many countries following a model of economic and political transition as it tries to go from a centrally planned economy to a market-oriented one. The Asian region has positively

influenced transitional countries like Vietnam with its wider pattern of economic development. The countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) support each other with both capital investment and markets for goods. Suppliers of goods and services and customers for market-oriented economies are available locally while countries like Japan and Singapore are actively channeling their large supplies of capital and technical know-how into the Southeast Asian region (CSIS 1994:21). Vietnam is benefiting from regional sources of investment.

The reformation of national economies is approached differently in Europe and Asia, depending upon internal and external factors. Debates over transition revolve around the pace taken in adopting open-market forces. Some countries take a rapid approach to change, some take a gradual approach, others fall somewhere in between. Critics of reforming at a rapid pace are concerned with the mass unemployment that may result from a rapid privatization of state companies. Privatization of state owned industries involves massive structural change and employee lay offs. The development of social safety nets to support those displaced from closed factories must be a component of change.

Vietnam's economic renovation policy: Doi Moi

The move to change the economic foundation of Vietnam is associated with the Sixth Party Congress of December 13-19, 1986 where *doi moi* was officially adopted. Reforms in the institutional structure of the economy followed in 1987-1988, mainly with the passing of a liberal foreign investment law and a two-tier banking sector. But the core of the transition period was 1988-1989, when the centralized control of output and prices was dismantled and land-user rights were established in the agricultural sector (IMF, 1996:4).

Every country undergoing reform has a special set of circumstances that leads to the decision to transform the economic system. In the case of Vietnam, a pattern of political and economic events contributed to the policies adopted in the mid-eighties. The source of Vietnam's economic hardships throughout the 1980's was both internal and external.³ The crux of the matter is related to four main factors. First, after unification of the country (after the Vietnam War) there was serious dislocation in the economy of South Vietnam, because it was based on private enterprise and light industries. Second, following Vietnam's conflict with China, aid and trade with China ceased and there was a great exodus of Chinese entrepreneurs and skilled workers out of Vietnam. Third, the U.S. trade embargo that went into effect in 1975, stifled industrial production in the South. Fourth, Vietnam's intervention in Kampuchea in 1979 resulted in a huge reduction in aid from Europe, Japan and international organizations. These factors adversely affected the national economy in Vietnam and contributed to the need for national economic change.

What we are seeing in Vietnam is a country that started out with a conservative pace of development in the mid 1980s, but was pushed to increase the pace of transition. Initially, in the early 1980's, Vietnam began a gradual process of transforming the economy, and although there were many disadvantages facing Vietnam at this time, the initial conditions were favorable. Production was able to respond to supply, and there was an existing legacy of market activity in the south that was revived. By the late eighties and more so in the early nineties, the pace of change was increased. The change in momentum of economic renovation is attributed to a few significant events, namely

³ Vo Van Tri goes into detail on this matter in his book *Vietnam's Economic Policy Since 1975* (Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 1991)

the collapse of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), and the virtual elimination of Soviet aid after the fall of the Soviet bloc. Vietnam was not integrated too strongly with the former CMEA which collapsed in 1990-91, therefore the collapse was less painful than it might have been. However, the end of Soviet aid, which comprised about four percent of GNP in the early 1980's, had serious implications for Vietnam (CSIC 1994:28). The imposed embargo by the United States put one more handicap on Vietnam in its early period of transition. Consequently, the initial implementation of structural reform and financial stabilization policies was made more radical: private enterprise was encouraged more; agricultural sector reforms were set in motion; and price, exchange rates, and foreign trade were liberalized (IMF, 1996).

The pace of rapid growth that is in effect today is accompanied by frequent government policy changes (taxes, laws, etc.) and a fervent national campaign to repel the "social evils" associated with market economic development. Critics of Vietnam's transformation say that Vietnam is full of contradictions, stating that "the language and ideology of central planning are still deeply ingrained in the minds of politicians; the habit-forming effects of bureaucracy and administrative inertia are still rampant; socialist dreams and the realities of the market place clash in everyday life. The system of socialization, education and training does not prepare for life and work in a market economy... politics and economics do not always match" (Seibel, 1992:9). In contrast, those who have been impressed by Vietnam's accomplishments say that Vietnam's transition from a centrally planned to a socialist market economy has been both "swift and effective" (World Bank, 1992).

Vietnam's economic transition has been positive in that the country has been enjoying significant increases in output, exports have risen, and remittances from Vietnamese abroad have continued as a source of foreign capital. However, the negative effects are that there is a thriving black market, the financial system is still quite primitive, and state enterprises continue to absorb a lot of the official capital. Rural to urban migration in Vietnam is putting an added stress on employment.

EMPLOYMENT IN VIETNAM

Employment, the focus of this study, is a key feature of Vietnam's economic transition. Domestically, the reform of Vietnam's socialist system will influence the way in which labor markets operate. In Vietnam, privatization of state companies saw over 1 million public sector employees dismissed from their jobs. Public sector employment dropped from over 4 million in 1988 to less than 3 million in 1992 (IMF, 1996: table 3.1). About 85 percent of the decline was a result of state sector reduction. The continued stagnation of employment in the state sector, coupled with the labor it has shed, will increase the need for private and co-operative sectors to generate more employment (Forbes, 1996:43).

Vietnam is one of the densest countries in the world. Population explosion and in-migration of people looking for work in urban areas has placed tremendous demands on the job market. In 1992, Vietnam's population reached 70 million. Vietnam is expected to grow to 80 million by the year 2000 with some 45 million people, mainly young workers, active in the labor market (ILO 1993:1). The rapid increase of population and the displacement of workers from state jobs, create a situation of increasing competition for employment.

Vietnam's labor force is growing at about four percent per annum. Most of the labor force growth is the result of population growth, changing labor force participation, and structural changes. In 1992, an estimated 2.2 million workers (6.9 percent of the labor force) were unemployed.⁴ Unemployment and underemployment are serious problems in Vietnam and rank high on the priority list of the government; the main issue of employment is one of labor absorption (ILO 1993). In the past, employment was transient in nature. New entrants to the labor force were classified as unemployed during their period of waiting for work opportunities. Today, unemployment can be characterized as structural, the unemployed persons include both new entrants and retired workers, and unemployment reflects the economy's inability to absorb available labor.

Underemployment is another serious problem. Vietnam is still predominantly agrarian. In 1992, approximately 27 percent of the labor force employed in agriculture was underemployed (ILO 1993: 5). In the state and cooperative enterprises, about 2.5 percent of the workers, or about a half a million workers, were also underemployed. Due to the decollectivization of agriculture, the character of underemployment has changed. Previously, collective agriculture led to work-sharing within a large group of workers, today it leads to work-sharing within individual households. Consequently, underemployment is now more directly linked to poverty and can lead to labor migration out of agriculture (ILO 1993). The urban economy is thus affected.

The International Labour Office compiled a report in 1993 on labor and employment in Vietnam. The report states that it is difficult to accurately assess the employment condition in Vietnam due to

⁴ This is calculated by using the standard methodology (labor force employed + unemployed), the labor force in 1992 was estimated to be 31.9 million.

a lack of available data. The data that are available on employment and unemployment are often difficult to interpret. Vietnamese classification systems further complicate the ability to analyze and compare information on employment because the systems used often do not coincide with those of other countries. Only recently have efforts been made in Vietnam to prepare estimates by using the United Nation's System of National Accounts. Vietnam's statistical service suffers from a shortage of trained labor and inadequate computing facilities. Hence the statistical data are of poor quality because of insufficient coverage, inaccuracy in interpretation, and computational errors (ILO 1993: 3).

Labor force influx: some causes

Vietnam's excess of available labor is the result of a number of things. International events have added to Vietnam's excess of people of working age. Vietnamese laborers working overseas have been repatriated from a number of countries: East Germany canceled the contracts of over 20,000 workers, 24,000 returned from Bulgaria, and 40,000 returned from the Czech Republic (Forbes, 1996: 43). In addition to those repatriated, the government demobilized 800,000 soldiers after its withdrawal from Cambodia, but there was so much difficulty in finding jobs for those released (500,000 soldiers released between 1988- 1990) that the demobilization program had to be slowed (Forbes, 1996:43). Finally, Vietnamese refugees returning from camps adds to the increase in people of working age. Refugees returning from camps throughout East and Southeast Asia are finding themselves back in Vietnam looking for jobs.

Spontaneous migration and organized migration (relocation) are also major contributors to the urban population and available labor force. Migration is an ongoing part of Vietnamese history. The Government organized the movement of people out of cities in the form of resettlement programs. This often results in high rates of return to the original place, and a backfiring of organized population alleviation or control programs. In Ho Chi Minh City, the housing problem is the most serious in the country because of the constant flow of migrants entering in search of jobs. It is estimated that there are one million slum houses along the canals in Ho Chi Minh City (ILO, 1993: 95). Rural to urban migration is perpetuating this problem.

Government Programs: Employment and Training

The Government has taken steps to address the problems of unemployment, underemployment, and labor influx with programs designed to train workers and help place people into jobs. The Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) is the main government body that oversees issues related to employment and training. MOLISA operates from the central government organizing and administering such things as: research, legislation, social insurance, labor protection, labor safety inspection, international relations, finance and planning, and personnel training. Departments corresponding with concerns of MOLISA channel government programs and policies to the local level. A complete chart of MOLISA's organizational structure can be found in the appendix.

The National Employment Fund (NEF) is a government fund established to help unemployed Vietnamese people re-enter the labor market. The NEF was established in 1992 in response to the growing number of State employees being affected by State sector privatization. It is the largest government effort to aid unemployed citizens through training and enterprise support. The NEF has

four main components: (i) State enterprise reform; (ii) enterprise reform; (iii) vocational training; and (iv) resettlement schemes. It operated on a budget of 830 billion Dong in 1992, plus reserve allocations (ILO, 1993:32). Proposals for aid from NEF are solicited from the following groups (ILO, 1993:32):

1. Individuals, household, and non-State enterprises
2. Local Peoples Committees
3. Associations, mass organizations, and professional societies

The fund is jointly managed by MOLISA, the State Planning Committee (SPC), and Ministry of Finance, which cooperate with working groups at both central and local levels. As the lead managing agency, MOLISA has developed guidelines for proposals, prioritizing small manufacturing and service enterprises in urban areas and non-farm activities in rural areas. This fund is a valuable asset to many unemployed Vietnamese citizens hoping to re-entering the labor force: However, the fund stipulates that the money is to be channeled first to surplus workers of the State sector, returning migrants, demobilized soldiers, graduates from vocational training schools, poor people, and disabled persons (ILO, 1993:32). Proposals that create many jobs (e.g., bakeries, garment factories, manufacturers) and are economically feasible, are the most desirable according to the NEF decree.

The ILO, in a 1993 report on employment, strongly recommended that “the development of a national strategy be undertaken as an entirely nationally executed, participatory exercise involving representatives from the small enterprise sector, government, academia, NGOs, the State enterprise sector, and other key players”. The report further recommended that Local Enterprise Development Agencies be established to provide support and services. These recommendations are part of a larger

strategy that includes strengthening the banking system and increasing the range of professional expertise in Vietnam to fulfill the need for lawyers, trainers, consultants, engineers, and others. As the case is currently, this integrated approach to private sector and small-scale business expansion is necessary for the most sustainable approach to growth.

WOMEN IN THE LABOR FORCE

Women workers in Vietnam comprise over one half of the labor force. This has been the pattern for years. Since 1976, the percentage of women working in economic activities outside the household has been higher than that of men. In 1976, women accounted for 55.3 percent of the total number of workers and in 1988 women accounted for 54.1 percent (Lich, 1994:319). In 1990, women workers between the ages of 16-55 years made up 52 percent of the total labor force. Certain sectors of the economy are dominated by female employees. Women comprise about two-thirds of the labor force in agriculture and forestry, light industry and handicrafts, domestic trade, and the national education and public health sectors (ILO 1993:102). In the cities, hundreds of thousands of women work in textile factories which are hot, dusty, noisy, and in operation throughout the night (ILO, 1993). Less commonly recognized is that Vietnamese women perform a large share of the very heavy physical work in Vietnam. In the countryside, the cultivation of rice is left mainly in hands of the women, who do back-breaking tasks such as soil preparation, the building of dikes, seeding, and standing in water to transplant and weed.

In Vietnam, women are concentrated in the lower rungs of the occupational scale and are in non-decision-making positions. The 1989 general census classified 92 percent of the jobs in which

women were employed as unskilled. One reason may be that women are at a disadvantage in terms of lower educational and vocational skills. A sample survey (1,000 women) from the 1989 census showed that of the total female labor force, about ten percent were illiterate, almost half did not complete primary school, 29 percent completed primary school and just over one percent graduated from secondary or vocational schools. The 1989 population census also showed that of the 1,000 women surveyed, only 21 were technical workers, 33 were vocational school graduates, and 19 were college or university graduates (Lich, 1994:319). Lower educational attainment and skill level represents barriers to women in the work force.

A gender division in the labor force is being exacerbated with restructuring. Women's participation in low paid, low skilled jobs is growing while the representation of women in government, upper level management, and decision-making positions remains limited. There are also specific health hazards that women face in terms of employment. Pregnancy is one. Maternity leave is six months, but poverty is often so pressing that women use the leave period as an opportunity to take another job. High risks jobs are another. In Ho Chi Minh City tens of thousands of women are still working in 30 job categories on the prohibited list for women, such as loading and unloading goods at stations and ports. These jobs expose women to constant contact with dangerous and poisonous chemicals.

Women are employed in heavy industries, the chemical industry, road building and mining (Lich, 1994:319). Sanitation workers and night sweepers, people who sweep up the solid waste thrown into city streets and sewage drains, work during dangerous hours, anywhere from early evening to very

early morning, and must push carts with lanterns attached for visibility. These jobs are mainly done by women. Similarly, women make up the majority of recyclers who sort through garbage dumps and/or walk house to house buying paper, plastic, and other recyclables to resell at nominal amounts.⁵

Joblessness in Vietnam is a category that women disproportionately comprise. Female participation in the formal wage economy is a struggle for Third World women. Older women with children face more discrimination than single women between the ages of 15-25, because younger women without husbands or children are generally preferred by the formal sector (Drakakis-Smith, 1987).⁶ The lack of education and skill serves to perpetuate the difficulty in finding stable, formal sector employment and increases women's move to informal jobs or unstable petty commodity production. In Vietnam, although school entry is about the same for boys and girls, by 15 to 19 years old the proportion of school attendance for girls is only about half that of boys (ILO 1993:103). This fact supports reasons why Vietnamese women are found working unsafe, unpleasant, unskilled low paid jobs.

The current situation of more available workers than jobs has compelled many people to accept free market competition and the risks associated with it. Women have been able to move into the public economy and labor force, however, typically men get the first opportunities at jobs and they reap higher rewards. Women workers are the first to be laid-off and they are paid lower wages than their

⁵ For more on women and waste recycling in Ho Chi Minh City see the September 1994 IRCW report by Rekha Mehra et al.

Also see DiGregorio (1994) *Urban Harvers: Recycling as a Peasant Industry in Northern Vietnam*. East-West Center Occasional Papers.

⁶ Women ages 15-25 are usually preferred because they are more likely to be single, childless, and willing to work for nominal wages.

male counter parts (Economic Reform and Development in Vietnam, 1995: 207). The survey of living standards in Vietnam reports that the average urban woman's wage is 1.44 times lower than the average urban man's. They are also shown to work longer hours than men on average in urban areas. Inevitably, economic transition has compelled poor women to reduce spending and to work harder, longer hours to supplement their incomes.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The reform policies established by the Sixth Party Congress in 1986 officially recognized and created the basis for a multi sector economy in Vietnam. This was an important step in a country that formally restricted private sector activity. The reform policies stated that the private sector was to be viewed equally with the state sector and its development. This mantra was reiterated at the Seventh Party Congress in 1991 in the Strategy for Socio-Economic Stabilization and Development up to the Year 2000. It stated that *The private capitalist economy is to develop without limits in terms of scale and place in sectors and trades which are not protected by law*. It also states that: *All citizens shall enjoy freedom of business activity in accordance with the law, with their ownership and many forms of business organization in line with characteristics and level of productive forces that vigorously speed up the efficient growth of social production* (ILO 1993:19).

Since the economic reforms were introduced in Vietnam the private sector has been growing rapidly. In absolute numbers, private sector employment was estimated to be approximately 9.7 million in 1991. This represents a growth rate of 30 to 40 percent annually since 1988 when the total

employment was estimated at 3.7 million (ILO 1993:22). The private sector is becoming a powerful force in terms of its contribution to employment and output.

The private sector has two main components, private enterprises (consisting of larger registered units owned by one person or by two or more persons), and the household units which are very small, largely informal units. In 1990, there were approximately 1,000 registered private enterprises and approximately 340,000 household enterprises. The following table shows the structure of the private sector ⁷:

Table 2-1 DATA ON THE PRIVATE SECTOR

Sub-sector		Average Employ.	Investment (USD)	Value Added (\$/worker)	Primary Sectors in order of importance
<u>URBAN</u>	Private	13.7	30,000	813	Manufacturing, Repair, Agro-Processing, Restaurants, Trade, other.
	H-Hold	4.8	8,500	648	
<u>RURAL</u>	Private	10.4	5,700	773	Manufacturing, Agro- Processing, Repair, Trade, Restaurants, other.
	H-Hold	3.5	1,900	356	

Expansion of the private sector is not without its problems. For small businesses in particular, following government policies is precarious at times. The reform process is still characterized by rapid and unpredictable changes of policy for the private sector. An example of this was the movement to require all business signs in Vietnam, including advertisements, to be written in

⁷ *Employment, enterprise development and training in Viet Nam*, International Labour Office, Bangkok Area Office, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok, January 1993. Page 23.

Vietnamese, with all other languages represented in smaller print. The policy was rapidly enforced. The cost of these changes affected business cards, brochures, billboards and signs on businesses, which naturally met with reluctance from business owners. Government officials were openly ripping down advertisements, billboards, and business signs (more vigorously in Hanoi) and fining business owners. Months later the law was relaxed. Such examples have caused reluctance from companies thinking about expanding into Vietnam, and frustration by those already operating there. Perhaps the most vulnerable of those affected by costly changes in government policies are local Vietnamese small business people trying to survive in the competitive business environment.

SELF EMPLOYMENT

Self-employment is a popular way for people of lower incomes to maintain flexibility in changing economic climates. Women comprise a large number of those who are involved in informal and formal business in order to supplement incomes and to survive economically in discriminatory labor markets. Informal jobs are those that are not within the boundaries of formal or legal structures, enabling the participants to avoid formal tax collection and other regulations for small businesses. Self-employment sometimes overlaps with, or is hard to differentiate from, so-called informal sector jobs in developing countries. The type of self-employed jobs surveyed for the purpose of this paper were by all accounts formal. The women stall owners and traders interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City all owned businesses recognized by the Government and abided by the laws and regulations applicable to their business within the established urban marketplaces.

In addition to basic survival and flexibility, self-employment attracts women for personal reasons. It offers the chance to somewhat construct one's own working hours, allows the opportunity to take full control over decision-making, and offers a chance to make more money than that of a state employee in some cases. Most importantly, a high level of education is not required to engage in private business.

Characteristics of self-employment and small-scale enterprise

The term "small-scale business" includes a diversity of economic activities. It can vary significantly among countries, and between urban and rural areas. One way to consider the characteristics of small-enterprises is to look at three criteria: i) size of enterprise, ii) level of technology applied, and iii) type of entrepreneurship (Teszler, 1993: 17). Expanding upon these three criteria, the characteristics can be narrowed down further.

Size can be divided into small and micro. The most commonly used way to measure this is by the number of employees, total wage bill, or turnover volume. General employment data may fail to note full and part-time employment, or short-term wage and casual labor, or unpaid family labor which may lead to an inadequate account of things.

The second criteria, technology, is classified by criteria set by UNIDO 1979 (Teszler, 1993:22) :

1. Traditional - used widely in handicraft and cottage activities.
2. Modernizing - changes introduced to the production process (e.g., powerlooms).

3. Modern - the only major difference from modern large-scale manufacturing is in the size of the manufacturing plant.

The third and last criteria is the type of entrepreneurship. The different types found in small-scale enterprises are i) highly mobile survivalist self-employment, ii) co-operative arrangements among micro-entrepreneurs, and iii) well established, specialized enterprises.

Small-scale enterprises and micro enterprises are dynamic organizations that often include unpaid labor by household or family members and can have varying degrees of technology. Household or micro enterprises are rarely privy to modern or even modernizing forms of technology but types of entrepreneurship can vary. Survivalist self-employment in the form of hawkers is evident on every street corner, but in rural areas of Vietnam for example, co-operatives in aquaculture and women's silk production and handicrafts are on the rise with support from international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Specialized enterprises (such as hand-made laquerware) continue, but are often exploited by middlemen who farm out the work to households for nominal amounts.

Self-employment in the case of Vietnam

The pervasiveness of self-employment in Vietnam does not mean that it is an easy form of income generation. In Roger Teszler's article on small-scale business he writes, "self-employment is usually the 'domain' of the poorest of the poor, who, because they lack the resources (personal savings and/or those of relatives or friends) to establish a durable form of enterprise are forced to eke out a minimal living with the barest of means. The aim of such activities is simply to allow the entrepreneur to survive physically" (Teszler, 1993:23). For those interested in going into private

business in Vietnam, acquiring capital is a daunting task, competition is fierce, tax increases at the district level are unpredictable, and for those working alone there is no flexibility for sick days.

In the marketplace setting, the work of a self-employed seller/stall owner may be more physically demanding than the job of many employees in an office setting, particularly sellers who prepare and transport goods long distances. The working conditions may be less tolerable as well. Vendors must endure poor sanitation, excessive heat, a constant threat of theft, early working hours and often long preparation times. Some benefits of self-employment include: a degree of flexibility in working hours that may accommodate child care, cooking, and housework more easily, satisfaction from earning one's own income, and more decision-making power in private business.

The type of private business most urban women engage in is urban micro enterprises and household enterprises. Enterprises are small (2-5) people and will most likely remain small. They are an important part of the urban economy because the products are almost exclusively sold in the local market. A very low percentage (3-5 percent) have the potential to expand their business to the small and medium scale bracket (ILO 1993:45). The growth of this enterprise is constrained foremost by a lack of access to micro credit, supported by basic technical skills training and access to only basic facilities and markets (stalls in public markets).

THE INFORMAL SECTOR

In unison with private sector expansion, a plethora of informal trading and selling occurs outside the formal market structure. The liberalization of free markets has encouraged petty producers and

women to enter the informal sector in greater numbers. In Vietnam, the informal sector is hard to distinguish from the private sector. Many activities generally included in the informal sector, such as micro-business in trade or services, are legally conducted in Vietnam. Other small-scale businesses that may look legitimate are not. For example, coffee shops and cafes are a ubiquitous part of the urban landscape. Set up on the side of streets, in small front rooms, or under temporary awnings, unregistered cafes which look like part of the formal tax paying business sector, may prove to be informal. Tables with plates of food and chairs occupied by customers are disassembled in the blink of an eye when policemen are spotted nearby. A domino effect of cafe disassemblment can be traced down the length of a street. The informal sector despite its disguises is a thriving entity in Vietnam.

The prominent group of mobilized women workers, especially those in the informal sector, cannot be over emphasized in Vietnam. The drive to work in the informal sector is fueled by low wages and the prospect of a higher income, or for some, the chance at any income at all. A sample survey conducted in certain districts in Ho Chi Minh City found that the informal sector is absorbing 40 percent of the labor force (Du, 1995:9). Literature on the informal sector in different countries around the world shows that women are major players in the informal economy and many people supplement low paying, formal sector work with informal activities. Estimates from 1988 indicate that of the 1.3 million workers in the informal sector, about 64 percent were female (ILO 1992:24).

Issues related to the informal sector have been debated and refined over the years, and may include categories of self-employment in the urban economy as informal work. A wide range of activities

are considered "informal". An important characteristic of informal activity is that it falls outside the boundaries of social and labor legislation. Much of it depends on what taxes are paid and/or avoided by self-employed individuals in their business practices. Self-employed tradespersons, garbage pickers, stallholders, domestic servants, and small-scale manufacturers are included in the list of informal jobs. The women interviewed in Ho Chi Minh City for this study were in many cases tradespersons, stallholders, or small-scale manufacturers. However, they were operating within a government owned and managed marketplace. For the purpose of this study, the bulk of literature on the informal economy will not be referenced because the women interviewed operate under a specific management organization in the marketplace that imposes taxes according to government regulations. As with many poor and low-income people, some of the interviewees participated in economic activities outside of their marketplace businesses, which may very well be in the informal sector.

CONCLUSION

It is important to look at the larger issues surrounding Vietnam to properly consider how women and income generation fit into the current economic, social and political environment. Vietnam is in the process of transforming its national economy. With this transition, problems of unemployment and underemployment are putting limitations on people of working age in finding secure employment. In addition to the state of the labor force in Vietnam, women looking for wage earning jobs face different hurdles than men. Discrimination in wage and job opportunity is evident between men and women. Women are receiving less education than men, which is further inhibiting their competitiveness in the labor force.

Economic renovation policies have encouraged private sector activities and an overall expansion of the private sector in Vietnam. This change is encouraging for women, because new opportunities may offer a way to bypass the discrimination in other sectors by engaging in self-employment. Self-employment opportunities for women may be small-scale, but a continued expansion of the private sector offers inroads for income generation that are welcomed sources of economic gain. The cost of creating employment in this sector is low. Experience in Indonesia has shown that assistance may be delivered through "barefoot" banking officers who also provide basic extension services and assist in linking up clients with appropriate training at local vocational training institutions. The typical micro entrepreneur is middle aged with some experience from other jobs (ILO 1993:46). The expansion of micro enterprise is a way to provide employment for the older segments of the urban unemployed, women in particular.

CHAPTER 3 SUPPORTING LITERATURE

WOMEN & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Economists and feminists have been involved in gender-related discussions for decades. At the beginning of this century, wage discrimination was a contentious topic. Millicent Fawcett, an English feminist, pioneered the topic in 1918 and then later, during the 1930's, wage differentials between men and women were scrutinized in Britain by a number of male economists (Beneria, 1995). In the 1950's, neoclassical economists and labor economists entered into analysis of women's labor force participation. The following decade turned to the household and the analysis of household production. Similarly, the 1960's and 1970's analyzed labor market discrimination, segregation, and segmentation based on gender. The 1980's and 1990's have continued the marriage of gender and economic analysis with micro and macroeconomic models challenging traditional approaches to economic analysis.

The 1970's saw the first wave of feminists challenging international development policies. Ester Boserup's notable book *Women's Role in Economic Development* (1970), made clear the point that development policies are not necessarily neutral with respect to gender. The main focus of the 1970's contribution to women and development literature was based on adding "gender" to the bulk of development literature. Distinguishing between the terms "gender" and "sex" is important when discussing women's roles in a society. The conceptual distinction developed by Anne Oakley (1987) identifies sex as biological and gender identity as social and psychological as well as historically, and culturally determined. Gender is learned through a culture's socialization process that

determines what are acceptable male and female traits. Women assume different gender roles in society, consequently they have different needs which are constituted by ethnic, cultural, historical and economic determinants. The differences women experience are not only externally created by society, but also internalized by women individually.

The importance of the relationship between socioeconomic status and women in communities gained more attention at its debut at the World Conference on the International Women's Year in Mexico in 1975. Women were seen in a new light for their economic and social contributions, especially in poor nations. Women became more appreciated for their role in poverty reduction. In addition, their contribution to economic security within the family and household was a new focus of research (Roy et al, 1996).

In the 1980's economists added to the work of the 1970's by pursuing microeconomic analysis and interdisciplinary studies of development, including: the labor market, gender divisions of labor, informal sector studies, employment issues, international development, and the feminization of the labor force (Cagatay, et al, 1995). Following microeconomic analyses, macroeconomics were probed by feminist economists, which resulted in an appeal to economists to engender traditional macroeconomic models. Both conceptual and empirical work examined structural adjustment policies and found that there was a gender bias in macroeconomic models and mainstream economic theory.

Since the mid-1980's, feminist economists have argued that gender relations interact with market-oriented economic restructuring. Around the time of the United Nations Decade of Women Conference in Nairobi, Kenya (1985), attention shifted to macroeconomic issues such as: economic restructuring, the feminization and informalization of the labor market, globalization of production, and trade liberalization (Standing, 1989; Cohen, 1987; Elson and Pearson, 1989, Rowbathan and Mitter, 1994). These efforts have resulted in the accepted view that macroeconomic stabilization policies implemented in developing countries during the past 15 years have been neither class-neutral nor gender neutral (Cornia, Jolly and Stewart 1987; Bourginon, de Melo and Morrison, 1991).

Development policies and programs targeting women

As a result of the continual probing of gender in economics and development, policies and programs affecting women have developed along many lines over the past few decades. First there was the *welfare approach* that stemmed from the dissatisfaction of academics, professionals, economists, and researchers in the 1970's. It assumed women to be passive recipients of development and thus concentrated its efforts on aid. There has been the *equity approach* with the underlying logic that men should redistribute their gains from the development process to women of all socioeconomic classes. This approach encountered problems from the start because "taking back" economic gains is much harder than giving it. The *antipoverty* approach viewed women's poverty and inequity via their lack of access to private ownership and capital, focusing its efforts on employment for women and income-generating options to low-income women. The *efficiency approach* followed the objectives of structural adjustment policies, a favorite of many governments and international

agencies. Lastly, the *empowerment approach* centered its activities around increasing women's current position in the global economy by increasing self-reliance and internal strength. While recognizing that women experience different forms of oppression according to race, class, colonial history, and current international economic status, the empowerment approach challenged women to overcome oppressive structures and gain control over material and nonmaterial resources (Roy et al, 1996:11).

By examining women and their role in society through microeconomic and macroeconomic lens, women have been shown to be major contributors to families, households, and to their larger communities. Their role in production and household management is an extension of the economic tasks women take on, particularly in the Third World. This foundation is crucial to establish from the beginning when considering Vietnamese women in the context of this study. The gender aspect of macroeconomic stabilizing policies and structural adjustment that are being ignored in developing countries is a deep concern of feminist economists.

Areas of concern

Perhaps the two most worrisome gender issues in macroeconomic modeling are health services for women and the welfare of the next generation. The traditional approach to assessing social efficiency arrives at different conclusions than those which consider the effects of macroeconomic policy change on women. First, macroeconomic models constructed to analyze the effects of restructuring do not consider women's unpaid reproductive labor, and have overlooked the fact that privatization and reforms in the public sector result in cuts in public expenditure (schools, day cares,

etc.) and health care (Beneria, 1995). Cutting public expenditures increases the daily responsibilities of women. Second, assessing welfare based on traditional indicators (e.g., GDP per capita) are misleading since they are based on gender biased national accounts. By not factoring gender into macroeconomic analyses, it becomes more difficult to recognize that the welfare of the next generation may be jeopardized and the development of human resources inhibited (Beneria, 1995). These are pertinent issues in Vietnam today as macroeconomic stabilizing policies are being implemented, and reforms are taking place in the public sector affecting health care and public expenditures.

THE CASE OF VIETNAM

The effects of structural adjustment on the status of women in Vietnam are reflective of the literature reviewed. Patterns of women's marginalization are seen in transitional Eastern Europe economies as changes in labor force participation persists: "Women dominate employment in the service sector particularly in the education, health, and social care sectors, and they also constitute the majority of workers in the trade, culture and arts, communications and finance sectors" (Fong and Paull, 1993, 222).⁸ The gender dimension of restructuring in former socialist countries is most obviously seen in changes in women's status as workers. Socialist countries once boasted of high rates of female labor force participation and a large share of women in paid employment. Now women are facing unemployment, marginalization, and the loss of benefits (e.g., healthcare, childcare, subsidies) previously provided for by socialist governments (Moghadam, 1993:342).

⁸ In reference to a chapter in Moghadam (1993) comparing women's economic status and restructuring in seven Eastern European countries: Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Albania.

The introduction of the economic renovation in Vietnam has placed greater demands on women by forcing them to be more aggressive in the work force without being relieved of their household responsibilities. Generally, the “triple role of women”, a concept describing the simultaneous roles women traditionally assume, productive, reproductive, and community management, are sometimes difficult to differentiate between in the Third World context because women’s work in the household and community often goes unnoticed (Moser, 1987). Women in Vietnam are responsible for completing the bulk of unpaid household chores in addition to seeking paid employment outside the home. In urban areas, the burdens placed on women are said to be exaggerated with the country’s transition towards free market because there are fluctuation in prices and reductions in social services (e.g., kindergarten, health care) (Tran, 1996).

Women have been both blessed and cursed by *doi moi*. On one hand, they are now free to work for foreign companies rapidly entering Vietnam, they can explore new opportunities in private business and trade, they may benefit from the rapidly expanding service sector, and they can partake in the growing number of joint-venture opportunities. The surge in private companies offering courses in accounting, tourism, reception and office skills, business English and secretarial skills is testament to the growing demand for skills in which urban women are currently investing.

In contrast to the benefits of economic transformation, women also experience many negative side effects. Education for females is falling below that of males and the drop out rates of girls by secondary school age is higher than boys. Competition for wage jobs is fierce and women’s lower education and skill level puts them at a disadvantage to men. Even with the changes brought on by

doi moi, the supply of jobs is still below the demand. The influx of companies and international firms in Vietnam are in the position to take advantage of the surplus of labor and are able to enjoy paying low wages to desperate people. Women who are fortunate enough to have a high school or college education still face discrimination in the job market. In wage earning jobs for example, women generally get hired after men and earn less. Moreover, women are more vulnerable when laid off from a long term job. In State companies that are being privatized women are being laid off in mass numbers with nothing to fall back on. Health care and education subsidies are decreasing which jeopardizes women more often than men. Rural poverty and the difficulty in finding jobs for the unskilled is encouraging growth of the sex trade in cities, which see a constant flow of foreign businessmen and tourists.

CAPITALISM AND THE STATUS OF WOMEN

The growth of a multisector economy in Vietnam could function as a venue for greater integration of women into the labor force. The pace of economic development and capitalist market expansion in Vietnam is so strong that women's inclusion in the process is inevitable. The way in which women are included in new open-market opportunities is a matter of concern. Opinions about capitalist development are argued in relation to women and the family in Vietnam. Kathleen Barry writes, "However, while socialism generally treats capitalism and feudalism as material, objective conditions of exploitation, it often treats women's subordination as a product of ideas of ideologies" (Barry, 1996:12). The commitment to 'family happiness' in Vietnam is linked to traditional beliefs. Barry argues that these traditional beliefs remain active in the cultural ideology of 1990's Vietnam, compatible with socialist ideology that "emphasizes economic disparity and disequilibrium", effect

women and family relations in the face of capitalism. The caveat is that if women are marginalized in the process of structural adjustment then the strongest and most sustainable form of economic development will not be realized for the country as a whole.

There is some debate over whether capitalism and a market-based economy are good for the socioeconomic status of women. There are two schools of thought on this matter. One school argues economic development has benefited women and one school argues that it has subjugated women in relation to men. The relative socioeconomic status of women is difficult to measure, often resulting in GDP per capita being used as the primary indicator of economic development despite its recognized shortcomings (Tisdell, 1996). The following theoretical viewpoints offer an alternative to basic GDP per capita measurements of development.

Supporters of this view feel that the spread of capitalist markets and economic growth will improve the relative economic status of women. This view argues that the market system, assuming it is nondiscriminating, offers new opportunities for women outside the typically patriarchal household which can increase their economic status in relation to men. With market expansion, specialization in production and employment can flourish, hence more jobs for women result. Perfect competition in the market system will ensure equal wage pay because employees would be paid the value of their marginal product rather than by race or gender.

In addition to employment opportunities, optimists argue that economic growth will increase the supply of educational opportunities and health services. Higher education has been shown to

correspond to better employment opportunities and in fertility, leading to smaller family size. Women stand to benefit more than men from better health services and supply because their access to these services is low when GNP per capital is low (Tisdell, 1996). Proponents of the optimist theories maintain that these factors help to break poverty cycles and that without economic growth and market expansion women cannot gain economic independence (Tisdell, 1996).

The pessimist school of thought contradicts those acknowledging only positive effects of market growth on the socioeconomic status of women. Some Marxists say that the spread of capitalistic market systems is the cause of women's inferiority to men (Tisdell, 1996). This theory is based on the idea that primitive societies (resource sharing communes) flourished before Western "capitalist-inspired colonialism and imperialism" began in the 1500s, which imposed a male-dominated European system of property rights and economic markets. Colonialism and world trading systems are an important strand of pessimist theories. Some contend that colonialism and world trading displaced women as traditional traders in Africa, the Caribbean, and many parts of Asia (Tisdell, 1996). They question whether Western European colonialism decreased the economic status of women in relation to men by increasing the economic status of men via land titles, cash economy, mines, etc. consequently marginalizing women in the countries colonized. Engels (1972) believed that the "deterioration of the socioeconomic status of women began with the advent of capitalism because men became the principal owners of capital and property" (Tisdell, 1996:26).

WOMEN, FAMILY AND THE HOUSEHOLD IN VIETNAM

In recent years, the family has become a focus of national attention in Vietnam. More attention is being paid to rhetoric about the role of the family in the country's renewal. Government efforts are focused on retaining the family as a unit of stability and tradition. The acknowledgment of the institution of family and its contribution to national stability is a reoccurring approach taken to achieving social order in Vietnam. Confucianism places high value on family and community. The undercurrent of Confucianism in Vietnam inadvertently helps to fundamentally support the use of the family in political agendas.

During the revolutionary period in the mid 1900's conservatives talked of wanting to conserve "national essence" and therefore resorted to a Neo-confucianism that emphasized the family as the foundation of society and female subordination as the foundation of the family. Interesting enough, with the onset of economic renovation, the fear of losing 'national essence' is again in the spotlight and a campaign to reject "social evils" by focusing on traditional family values is echoing the days of colonization. There is even an organizational hierarchy of departments set up for the "prevention and treatment of social evils" from the central to the local level.⁹ The cause of the current struggle between conformity to the modern family verses the traditional family is blamed on the development of the commodity economy and the influence that newly found Western cultures are having on Vietnam.

⁹ A chart of the organizational machinery can be found in the Statistical Yearbook of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs, 1994, page 216.

Women are seen as primary catalysts to preserving tradition and family values in Vietnam via their role in the family and household. The household in the first world context has been brought to attention by those studying the restructuring of capitalist economies. In Vietnam, the household has been studied primarily in the rural context regarding changes from collectives and state cooperatives. Only recently have there been studies of the household economy from the angle of male-female relationships (Anh, 1995:53).

Changes in the household structure

The concept of household economy, via women's contributions, is directly related to the project conducted in Ho Chi Minh City and thus, the following section will expand upon these concepts in the Vietnamese setting. The concept of the *household* in Vietnam is defined by a group of people living under the same roof with a common fund of expenses and receipts (Thi, 1996:63). Household members may be friends, relatives, blood relatives, or acquaintances. In Vietnam there are a number of collective households, however, they rarely share common funds, expenses and receipts.

The idea of the household during the agricultural cooperatives of the 1960's and 1970's were different from households today. The household in Vietnam is no longer limited to agricultural production on the five percent area of the total land owned by the household. The household economy has expanded in pace with the expansion of the multisector economy. With economic transition in Vietnam, changes have taken place in household composition and income. From 1990 to 1993 there was an increase in the gap between rich and poor households: the percentage of rich

households rose from 8 percent in 1989 to 12.2 percent in 1990, while the percentage of poor households rose from 9.4 percent in 1989 to 15.9 percent in 1990 (Duong Thoa, 1995:34).

Household structure is changing in Vietnam. There has been a dramatic increase in the total number of households from 1979 to 1989. Figures show that the increase has been in the formation of many more small households with the size of the average household falling from 5.22 to 4.88 persons. Two things should be taken into consider with the increase of more small households in Vietnam. First, the population and family planning program of the UNFAO and Vietnamese government currently active in Vietnam, has affected the number of children being born per family.

Second, there is a movement of younger couples from the extended family organization to a nuclear family setting. In the ten years from 1979 to 1989 the number of single-person households decreased while the number of households from three to six persons grew (Thi, 1996:64). Two-generation families in Vietnam comprise on the average 60 to 80 percent of the total number of households in all localities. Table 3-1 shows the changes in the size of the average household in Vietnam.

Table 3-1 : NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN HOUSEHOLDS: 1979 and 1989¹⁰

Number of people in household	1979	1989
1 person	6.9%	5.8%
2 persons	10.4%	9.7%
3 persons	13.5%	15.0%
4 persons	15.0%	18.9%
5 persons	14.4%	17.2%
6 persons	12.5%	13.4%
7 persons	10.1%	8.9%
8 persons	7.3%	5.6%
9 persons	4.6%	2.9%
10 persons	5.3%	3.4 %

Many state operated socioeconomic policies of renewal directly effect households. In Vietnam during the time when the policy of giving land to families for long-term use was in progress, land distribution was calculated on the basis of household members in the labor force. In the city, the allocation of housing was also based upon the number of people per household and the characteristics of each household. The desire to develop a market economy in Vietnam has encouraged the growth of private household economy in many forms: farms, cottage industry, service shops and family handicraft production. Consequently, both family and household are now taking on important roles as catalysts of economic renovation. In light of the economic gains that have been made in Vietnam thus far in its renovation process, one must recognize that the living conditions of Vietnamese families are still among the lowest in the developing world.

¹⁰ In Barry, Chapter 3 "Women, Marriage, Family and Gender Equality" by Le Thi, Page 64.

ACCESSING CREDIT AND WOMEN

Accessing credit has always been a major hindrance for women, especially in developing countries. Yet it is recognized that credit is paramount to poverty alleviation and household economic development. In the 1980s, credit programs were hailed as the latest in enabling strategies, and praised for their devotion to helping women. Poor women around the world emerged from microcredit programs as credit debutantes who rarely defaulted on loans, created successful businesses, and efficiently shared the fruits of their labor with their children, households and communities. The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh and the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India are perhaps the two most notable initiatives in providing credit to poor women. Both programs devote their lending resources to women, while integrating the financial aspect with business training and technical support for women. The Grameen Bank and SEWA continue to served as models for other credit programs focusing on women in developing and industrialized countries. The Grameen Bank was so successful in administering loans for production that it later expanded its program to offer housing loans to members. Credit programs for rural and urban women alike are now an active part of the agendas of governments, non- governmental organizations and international lending organizations.

Although their business savvy has been proven time and time again, women from every walk of life struggle to mobilize capital funds through a number of sources in times of need. The issue of credit is often closely connected with land and asset ownership, which subjugates women in areas where men hold the titles to land and assets. In addition to general hurdles facing anyone desiring a bank loan, women may have to confront cultural barriers that place their needs below that of men.

Borrowing money for start-up capital poses more problems for women who usually invest in small-scale, household production or cottage industries. Even in industrialized countries, banks often shy away from micro loans, restricting their transactions to medium and large loans, which are beyond the amount needed by most poor households to facilitate small-scale self-employment. Despite this gap in micro lending by formal institutions, the benefits of small loans on the household can be significant, which has motivated organizations outside the banking system to provide program oriented credit facilities to the poor. Women are being targeted as the primary beneficiaries in many cases because they are omnipresent in small-scale production and are good candidates for loan repayment.

SUMMARY

Chapter three highlighted literature on women and economic development to show how it reflects the Vietnamese case. The topic of studying women in Vietnam and the factors which affect their economic livelihood is only a glimpse of a larger global picture of women and economic development. There is a host of literature on gender and economics which supports reasons for valuing women's economic contributions to society and their households. Some of this has been achieved by conducting analysis of women in economic models above and beyond the traditional economic approach. How women have been perceived in international development programs has also changed over the years. Women have been targeted in a number of different programs in the international sphere, some of which proved to be far less effective than others. The gender aspect of macroeconomic stabilization policies and structural adjustment should be continually reevaluated to

get the best results for women and men. Chapter four explains the information gathered in the research study to consider more specifically in terms of the literature discussed.

The role of women in the household and family in Vietnam was brought out in chapter three to draw attention to the importance of women in the household structure. The gender roles they assume are being absorbed into political agendas that target women as the primary catalysts to preserving tradition and family values, in a time when Vietnamese officials are concerned about the negative influences of western society in Vietnam.

CHAPTER 4 THE RESEARCH STUDY

INTRODUCTION: WOMEN AND THE MARKETPLACE

Women as traders is not a new concept. Women have been active in marketplaces around the world by trading along spice routes, selling produce from hinterlands, accessing foreign goods for local use and trading local goods for foreign use. This entrepreneurial history, played out in marketplaces in all corners of the world, has fulfilled a variety of purposes for the women entrepreneurs from supplementing family or household incomes to gaining wealth, land and political power to providing personal autonomy over decision-making.

There are functional benefits of working in marketplaces that allow women to balance the responsibilities of motherhood, housework, and economics. In her study of market sellers in Lima, Peru, Ximena Bunster writes, "women in developing countries find that trading allows them the flexibility necessary to integrate daily maintenance of household with income-generating pursuits" (Bunster, 1986:92). Through participating in trade and sales, women are able to exercise an important degree of power in their communities. Although a limited amount of attention and research has been paid to women in the marketplace, some studies have been conducted in African and South American countries which will be referenced in this section. The experiences of case studies in Africa and Peru are reflective in many ways of the situation found in the Ho Chi Minh City marketplace study discussed in this paper.

PART 1 THE MARKETPLACE INTERVIEWS

The intention of this study was to collect a variety of responses from women with different social, economic, ethnic and educational backgrounds. The findings are compared by marketplaces according to these general topics : demographics, employment history, business autonomy, time allotment for work, household composition, satisfaction with their job, and accessing capital for business purposes. See Appendix I for a copy of the questionnaire.

PERSONAL PROFILE OF SELLERS

It is important to show the demographic character of the sellers in the two marketplaces in order to paint a general picture of women working in these locations. Some of the main demographic questions asked were regarding age, education, place of birth, and current place of residence. There was a slight difference in the profile of the average seller at the two marketplaces. The averages for age and level of education are as follows:¹¹

Table 4 -1 BACKGROUND OF SELLERS

	Tan Binh Market	Phung Hung Market
Average age of sellers	37.5 years	44.2 years
Average level of education	grade 9.89	grade 4.4
Year women began business (average)	1990	1981
Who decides on location and inventory?	"she" = 75.5%	"she" = 60.4%
Hired persons	"none"= 90.6%	"none"= 96.2%
Who is the manager of daily income/profit from the business?	"she"=90.6%	"she"= 92.5%

¹¹

Tan Binh Market (District Tan Binh) = large indoor market
Phung Hung Market (District 5) = outdoor street market

Age, education and average starting year

Findings show that the profile of the average seller is a middle aged women. The women in the open street market were generally older in age and had a lower level of education. In Phung Hung Market, most of the women had dropped out of the educational system after primary school. This information coincides with national data on schooling for boys and girls as stated in Chapter One (education levels for girls show a high drop out rate of girls by the time of secondary school). This is not surprising considering that Phung Hung Market is a smaller market and attracts poorer women than those who have enough capital to open a stall in a large indoor market. Children from poorer families usually drop out of school at earlier ages to help contribute to family incomes and girl children of primary school age, more often than male children, forego schooling for income generation. This is not to conclude that the business techniques or success of the Chinese traders is less than that of the ethnic Vietnamese.

However, another factor to be considered is the ethnic Chinese who comprised half of those interviewed in Phung Hung Market. The interviewers found that some of the ethnic Chinese sellers in this market only spoke Chinese or knew a limited amount of Vietnamese, and therefore could not be interviewed. This could be a reflection of the lower formal educational attainment by this ethnic group. The average level of education (grade 3) of the ethnic Chinese interviewed in this market was lower than that of the ethnic Vietnamese (grade 6) which influenced the overall average in Phung Hung Market. Similarly, the average age of the ethnic Chinese interviewed was four and a half years

older than that of the Vietnamese. None of the women interviewed randomly in Tan Binh Market claimed themselves to be Chinese.

BUSINESS AUTONOMY

In addition to the sociopolitical influences of women in the marketplace, there are also significant socioeconomic influences. Trade and entrepreneurialism can affect women's decision-making power that extends beyond the marketplace and into the patriarchal societies that most women live. In a study of women in Ghana, Claire Robertson found that one facet of Ghanaian women's decision-making was that they saw the advantages of autonomy from males and seriously guarded information about profits from husbands (Robertson, 1995). This specific aspect of autonomy and financial secrecy was not explored in Ho Chi Minh City. It should be mentioned that unlike cultures that deem the male the sole manager of household finances, in Vietnam it is often an accepted role of an urban woman to manage the finances, and in some cases, give her husband an allowance.¹²

Survey questions were devoted to inquiries about the women's decision-making power. This is important in connecting women's control over personal decisions with Vietnam's economic renovation policies and participation in the free market. If the women sellers have complete control over their business profits, this has implications for where and how they spend it. Literature on women and the household economy foreshadows women's attention to children, nutrition, and household needs when spending and managing money.

¹² Note: this information was collected through informal interviews, not a systematic study.

When asked "who decides where and what to sell in this business?", 60 percent of the sellers interviewed in Phung Hung Market said "she" decides. Another 6 percent made decisions with another person, and the remaining were told by someone where and when to sell. In Tan Binh Market, 75.5 percent of the sellers interviewed said "she" made the decisions, while another 13 percent said the decisions were made by her and another person. The remaining left the decision to someone else. A portion of the sellers interviewed were in business because they were continuing on a family business of selling a certain product, in which case a location had usually been already established.

The women were asked "who controls the profits yielded from the business?" Ninety-five and a half percent of the women in Phung Hung Market said "she" did, and 92.5 percent of the women in Tan Binh Market said "she" did. The small percentage remaining was controlled by either husbands or parents, usually parents. Considering that less than 10 percent of the women sellers were not in control of their profits shows a high degree of financial autonomy among these self-employed women.

MOTIVATIONS FOR BECOMING A MARKETPLACE SELLER

Why are women in Ho Chi Minh City driven to work in urban marketplaces? Why are women around the world choosing to work for market income when personal costs are high? In Chapters 3 (King and Evenson) and 8 (Popkin) in *Women and Poverty in the Third World*, the authors indicate from their studies in the Philippines that women chose this path to increase total family welfare

(Buvinic, Lycette, & McGreevey, 1983). If estimated full incomes are higher in households when women are employed outside the home then benefits outweigh the costs.

There is a cultural entity to why women work in the market place. Women in Ho Chi Minh City were asked why they began selling in the marketplace as an occupation. The cultural aspect of generations of family members working as traders and mothers teaching their daughters to sell at early ages was not uncommon. Nor was it uncommon for a woman to answer that given her training and education, or lack there of, it was the only occupation available. The same answers were found in comparative market studies in Ghana and Kenya.¹³ In addition, the networks formed by self-employed women in the marketplace are strong and resilient, providing a needed support system in countries with unstable economies and little or no social safety nets. In Ho Chi Minh City, even when women stated that their businesses were losing profits and they were unable to compete with other sellers, many of them still claimed it was "not necessary" to change their job. The social networks within the marketplace and the autonomy that comes from working in this environment are valuable to women. Some evidence of the cultural influence on women and marketplace occupations were the responses of women working as sellers because "it fits her life style" or it is "suitable for her age".

¹³ For more detailed explanation see Robertson, Chapter 6 in *African Market Women and Economic Power* (1995).

Table 4-2 REASONS FOR BECOMING A SELLER IN THE MARKETPLACE

Choice of Responses

Average Age	I don't know how to do anything else	This job requires a low capital investment	My family does this trade	It offers time flexibility	Other
43.3	24	11	21	4	16
Phung Hung	45 %	21%	40%	8%	30%
37.81	21	13	14	6	29
Tan Binh	40%	25%	26%	11%	55%
TOTAL	42.4 %	22.6 %	33.9 %	.09 %	42.4 %

A surprisingly low percentage of women (9%) said they chose to become a seller because of the flexibility of time it offers. Bunster's study of marketplace women in Peru concluded that the occupation of marketplace selling was compatible with responsibilities of childcare and home responsibilities. The fact that a small number of women in the Ho Chi Minh City study did not find time flexibility an incentive to become a market seller does not mean that it necessarily contradicts Bunster's findings in urban Lima, Peru. The term "flexible" could be something that is perceived differently in the case of Ho Chi Minh City. The women in Lima, Peru considered their occupation flexible and compatible with their other responsibilities because they could bring their children to work with them. Women in Vietnam often bring their children to the marketplace too. However, the relatively high rate of school enrollment for children in Vietnam, may relieve some of the daily childcare responsibilities for Vietnamese women that women in Peru were experiencing. In urban

Lima, the women interviewed were specific about their home responsibilities or unpaid productive labor as motivation in choosing their marketplace occupation. In Ho Chi Minh City, the large percentage of responses in the "other" category (42.4%) arguably included reasons related to home responsibilities of Vietnamese women, such as caring for elderly household members or because "parents are poor". Others were found returning to the marketplaces in their later years because "husband died and the income was needed".

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY AND TIME ALLOTMENT FOR TRADE

The women's employment history was asked in the questionnaire to gauge how many women have entered the private sector since Vietnam's economic renovation policies were officially adopted in 1986. The main reasons for this question was to see how many women changed from a state job to a job in the private sector within the last 10 years. This question is fully applicable given the average age in the two markets was 37.5 and 44.2 years old. The bulk of the women interviewed would have been of working age since the induction of *doi moi*. The question was posed two ways. First the women were asked if they have worked for a company at anytime before 1995. They were also asked to list (in a matrix format) the jobs that they have held and the sector it falls under in three particular years: 1994, 1990, and 1986. This would clarify their employment pattern since the official adoption of the *doi moi* policies and would show whether the respondent was a student, unemployed, working in the home, or for a State company at those particular times.

Questions regarding time devoted to business activities were developed to compare how much time women working in a marketplace spend each day on their business in relation to an average work day in

a wage earning job. The women interviewed were asked to log the number of hours they spend in certain daily tasks, and at what time they begin, including: actual time selling at the market; time spent preparing for sales; time spent in transport to and from the marketplace; and any time spent working other jobs (e.g., some type of home production or time spent at a stall in another location). They were also asked to log how many hours they spend for housework and childcare each day.

Table 4- 3 ADDITIONAL INCOME GENERATION

	Tan Bin Market	Phung Hung Market
Do you engage in business anywhere other than here?	"no" = 91 %	"no" = 96.2%
The percentage of women who have NOT worked outside the private sector since 1986.	67.9 %	90.4 %

Table 4-4 TIME ALLOTMENT FOR ACTIVITIES

	Tan Binh	Phung Hung
Average time spent at stall	9.4 hours/day	6.9 hours/day
Average time spent in preparation	.9 hours/day	1.7 hours/day
Average time spent in transport	.41 hour	.67 hour
Average time dedicated to housework and childcare	1.9 hours/day	1.35 hours/day

The results showed that 90.4 percent of the women in Phung Hung market had not worked in the State sector at any time since 1986. Rather, most women were active in trade and commerce during the ten year interval. A study in Malaysia of market and nonmarket activities found a similar pattern of limited occupation change. In their cross -sectional data analysis in Malaysia, DaVanzo and Lee suggest that although poor women adjust the hours they work in a given occupation as their child care responsibilities change, they are not likely to change their occupations over a lifetime (DaVanzo

& Lee, 1983). This information lends credibility to the flexibility of self-employment during volatile economic times in Vietnam. The situation in Tan Binh Market differed in that the marketplace was once owned by the State, but was privatized in 1995, giving some of the women laid off from the State company the chance to go into private trade. The results of the women interviewed still showed only about a third of them had worked in the State sector at any time since 1986: 67.9 percent had not worked outside the private sector. The large majority of the 105 women interviewed had been working as a seller of some sort or were unemployed at some time in the last 10 years.

TIME SPENT FOR BUSINESS

Results of the time allotment questions showed that the women sellers as a whole did not spend an excessive amount of time at their job, relative to a wage earner. The women spent on average anywhere from 8.6 to 10.3 hours a day, including preparation, at their business/stall. This is comparable to wage earning jobs, except that wage earners generally have Sunday off, and may work only half day on Saturday. Marketplace sellers work seven days a week. The following tables shows the time schedule of marketplace sellers on average.

In Tan Binh Market the women spent more time at their stalls, selling their products each day, but less time in preparation for their daily sales. This is understandable given that they have long term leases on their stalls, and the stalls are secured at night. The Tan Binh Market sellers are therefore able to keep more products on site, rather than hauling their goods to the market each day. The women at the street market, Phung Hung, focus more on perishable goods and must spend more time in preparation, be it cooking, cutting, or cleaning the items. The women interviewed at Phung Hung

Market spend up to an hour more each day, on average, preparing for sales than the women in Tan Binh Market. In contrast, the women in the closed Tan Binh Market spend more time per day actually selling (about two and a half hours a day) at their stall. The Phung Hung Market is active in the morning hours and after lunch many women close up sales for the day.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

The most immediate socioeconomic grouping, one which has been highlighted by feminist and non feminist writers alike, is the household. The household began a unit of economic analysis in response to work by labor economists and neoclassical economists interested in women's labor force participation. Women's economic incentive for participating in paid work was taken up and expanded into other spheres. Labor economist Jacob Mincer in the 1950's applied economic analysis to understanding the household, and Gary Becker continued this process in the 1960's along with other human capitalist theorists.

Research and writing about the "household" and the "household economy" has contributions from feminists, non feminists, anthropologists, economists, geographers and sociologists. The household has been defined by Donnacadh Hurley as: "Households are essentially social structures which can range in size from one individual to an extended family. The household is a support structure, and where there is more than one member it is generally, but not always, based on either marriage or blood ties" (Oxfam 1990). The key characteristic is the intensity of the social and economic interrelationships. Households are arranged voluntarily, except for small children, and can be dismantled at any time.

The household economy is a critical part of any economic system.¹⁴ A household is a unit that pools income for the purposes of production. The members of a household depend on each other through an organized effort to provide the necessities for personal survival. The household economy was brought into the academic sphere of discussion after feminists began to explore the household as a system of production, consumption and reproduction. Outside the circle of feminists, academics studies the household independent of the gender element, which also added to the complete understanding of the household (Burns, 1977; Pahl, 1984).

The political dimension of the household is as dynamic as the economic dimension. The members must pull together to make the most of their resources. This inevitably involves power struggles and internal politics. Conflicting interests among household members are very real aspects to the economic system. Therefore, households are like any political community in that the members have different degrees of access to the bases of social power, and decision making. (Friedmann, 1987: 357).

Women play a critical role in the household (in paid and unpaid labor) with respect to the household economic system. Literature on income generation schemes for the urban poor in developing countries has dealt with this topic (Hurley 1990, Brown 1979, Kennedy 1981). A woman's contribution to her household economy is more critical in poor societies, and yet formal jobs are harder for women to secure and unpaid household chores are more taxing. Even in industrialized

¹⁴ Wallerstein and Smith (1992) give a clear description of how the household economy is connected to the world economy.

countries, women find it difficult to get core jobs in the mainstream economy that are adequately protected by a country's employment and labor legislation. The exclusion of women from the mainstream economy is therefore especially problematic in the poorer parts of the world. In these countries, poor women survive by setting up as minuscule entrepreneurs. Alternatively, they find jobs in the unorganized or informal sector where employers are either exempt from legislation or cannot be monitored for disobeying it (Rowbotham 1994:15-16).

De jure and de facto head of household

The head of a household is often hard to determine. In different cultures being the head of household may have different connotations. According to a study on female headed households in Vietnam by Vu Manh Loi, "the household head may gain this position by: prescribed cultural norms, relative economic power (to his/her spouse), social prestige, the relative degree of life experience, by the persuasiveness of his/her arguments, or by structural situations (e.g., being the only adult in the house). Data from the 1989 Census has shown that female-headed households in Vietnam are an urban phenomenon. Aside from the lack of research on this topic in Vietnam, it is always difficult to collect data on heads of households because of the de jure/de facto possibilities, and because household hierarchies may differ in urban and rural areas.

As households are political in nature, a situation of de jure and de facto heads of households may exist. The de jure head of household is the household representative in name as well as in official papers and other writings. In Vietnam, for example, the head of the household is registered officially

in the census information. Land ownership, particularly in the rural areas, is associated with the head of the household. In the Vietnamese countryside, the heads of households are mostly males.

The de facto head of a household is the functioning leader of a household. The de facto head decides and carries out production activities and may manage household finances. They are often found to be women. This is true in the case of Vietnam as well, where rural de facto household chiefs are often women skilled in rice production, pig and poultry breeding. Men who migrate to urban areas for jobs may be absent from home for undetermined amounts of time in which a de facto head takes over (Anh, 1995).

Data from Ho Chi Minh City

The following table compares some data from the household matrices in the two marketplaces.

Table 4-5 HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION OF MARKET SELLERS

	Tan Binh Market	Phung Hung Market
Average number of people per household	4.3	5
Number of women who listed a husband in their household	71.6%	64%
Percentage of the husbands who are currently working	86.8%	52.9%
Percentage of women who listed themselves as the #1 income earner in her household	90.5%	92.5%

Data on husbands and their contribution to the household economy are particularly interesting and supports the literature on women's role in the household economy. In Phung Hung Market, of the women interviewed, only 64% were listed as having a husband in their household matrices. Of that

64 percent, only around half (53%) of those men (husbands) had jobs. This means that approximately 30 percent of the women interviewed in Phung Hung Market, receive contributions from a husband in their household economy. The husbands without jobs were listed most often as "unemployed" or "retired", which is significant because the retired husbands were usually not much older than their wives who worked in the marketplace. Seasonal employment and informal jobs may account for some unlisted income from those termed "unemployed". In Tan Binh Market, the women interviewed had a higher percentage of husbands in their households, and a higher percentage of working husbands: 71.6 percent of the women listed a husband in their household, and of that 71.6 percent, 86.6 percent were employed. In comparison to the women in Phung Hung market with only around 30 percent of the total having economically contributing husbands, about half of the women sellers Tan Binh Market had economically contributing husbands in their households.

The most significant data collected from the household matrices was the information about the top three income earners. Of the total 105 women interviewed, 91.5 percent of them claimed themselves to be the top income earner in their household. This reflects the economic importance of self-employment not only for women, but for the household. The average number of women, who claimed to be the bread winner was slightly higher among the women sellers in Phung Hung Market (92.5% of total) than in Tan Binh Market (90.5 %), but the high percentages in both markets presents a strong case for this sector of the economy.

The information collected showcases women facing different levels of difficulties with self-employment. Some are women who work in small, less profitable marketplaces. Some have low levels of education. Some must travel long distances to sell their goods and some have relatively large households (7 members or more). Yet 90 percent of these women may still be the top income earner in their respective household. This pattern shows women contribute significantly to the household economic system. Discouraging or undermining self-employment for women could negatively influence the more vulnerable household members, namely children and the elderly.

THE BUSINESS

There were two multiple choice questions about business satisfaction and two open-ended questions. The women sellers in this study were asked questions about how satisfied they were with their employment. The question was posed as a multiple choice question because focusing on the reasons for dissatisfaction would have been too broad to analyze. The open-ended questions served to support the multiple choice questions in gathering external reasoning.

Table 4-6 SATISFACTION WITH BUSINESS

Responses		Tan Binh Market	Phung Hung Market
Do you feel you must change your job?	Yes, Urgently	1. 8 %	0
	Must Change	18. 9%	3. 8 %
	No	67. 9%	90. 4 %
	I don't know yet	13. 2%	5. 8 %

Table 4-7 LIVING STANDARD

		Tan Binh Market	Phung Hung Market
How is your standard of living today compared to 10 years ago?	Improved	47.1 %	34. 6 %
	Worsened	25.5 %	30. 8%
	Stayed the same	26.4 %	32. 7 %

In both market samples, the majority of the women answered “no”, that it was not necessary to change their job, indicating that they were generally satisfied with their employment and perhaps their standard of living had improved. However, their answers regarding the change in their standard of living (compared to 10 years ago) were divided.

Judging by these answers, the overall satisfaction of the women is quite high. They generally do not feel the need to change their job. In Phung Hung Market, only 3.8 percent felt they should change, but no one felt it was urgent, even though 30.8 percent of the women interviewed said their standard of living had worsened. In Tan Binh Market 67.9 percent of the women saw no need to change their job, and only 1 person (1.8 percent of the total) felt it was urgent. Almost half the women interviewed in Tan Binh Market said their standard of living had improved since 1986.

BUSINESS LINKAGES OF MARKET WOMEN

Women operating a business from a marketplace use business linkages that stretch far beyond the city boundaries. The sophistication of their trading linkages indicates their current ability to access foreign markets and their ability to upgrade their products to higher profit items. It can also give a

better idea of the potential of traders to grow from an urban micro and household enterprises (2-5 employees) to a small and medium enterprises (5-50 employees). In the two marketplaces surveyed in Ho Chi Minh City, it is expected that Tan Binh Market would have more extensive business linkages because the women start with larger capital amounts and have the security to sell more non-perishable and imported items.

The questionnaire was interested in determining how many women use middlemen suppliers and manufacturing/import companies to access goods and how many simply go to another city market and buy their goods daily or weekly, such as in the case of perishable goods. In Ho Chi Minh City, the large marketplaces often have middlemen who specialize in certain goods. The middlemen work out of the marketplace to take orders on whatever product they deal (e.g., fresh fruits from Da Lat, electronics, fabric) for others to sell around the city. Some women buy and resell at the same marketplace. The middlemen are the supply contacts between foreign manufacturers or local companies. The skill of the middlemen and the women's ability to coordinate with them, increases trade links and product marketing.

The results of the survey showed a difference between the two marketplaces regarding their patterns of accessing goods. Tan Binh Market sellers were more likely to use many middlemen and different marketplaces to access goods to sell.

Table 4-8 BUYING PRODUCTS TO SELL

SOURCES	Tan Binh Market	Phung Hung Market
Buy goods from 1 marketplace	35.8 %	98.1 %
Buy goods from 2+ marketplaces	60.3 %	1.8 %
Use a middleman	75.4 %	18.8 %
Use a company or manufacturer directly	5.6 %	3.7 %

The information gathered on where women buy their goods is important to determining the sophistication and geographical reach of business linkages and relationships of marketplace women. The women in Phung Hung Marketplace had an overwhelming show of respondents buying goods to sell from only one source. This was to be expected, knowing that the sellers in Phung Hung Marketplace deal in small quantities and goods that are in the low price end of the buying scale. The women in this marketplace were also less likely to use a middleman to access their goods. For the most part, the women in Phung Hung Marketplace bought their goods direct from a large market somewhere in the city, avoiding complex business arrangements.

In Tan Binh Marketplace, the women generally deal with more middlemen when accessing goods to sell. The Tan Binh Marketplace women were not only more accustomed to working with middlemen, they were also more likely to use more two or more places/sources when accessing the goods they sell in their stalls. This indicates that the women in Tan Binh have established a wider network of business relationships when it comes to trade. The Tan Binh Marketplace women also had more contact with other traders in large marketplaces around Ho Chi Minh City through their business relationships with middlemen operating from within other marketplace locations.

The need for better marketing and information about new lines of products is important to the development of micro-business for women. Women who are operating in smaller marketplaces, and who have less working capital, are less likely to access the latest news about products or marketing.

The period of time prior to the introduction of Vietnam's economic renovation policy in the mid 1980's, the role of government was in tight control of resources, allocation, prices, production, and buyer-seller relationships. Private sector activity, once strongly discouraged in Vietnam, is now rapidly increasing and women working in micro-enterprises are struggling along with the rest of the country to manage, market, and expand their tiny place in the larger commercial market.

ASSESSING CAPITAL FOR BUSINESS

In Vietnam, women are hampered more than men by the lack of small-scale credit. Although changes in the banking system have increased the number of loans offered to the non-State sector, the supply is still too low for the demand (approximately 20 percent of the total credit in the south, and less in the north, were being given to the non-State sector in 1993) (ILO, 1993:28). Aside from the inadequate supply of loans, another major problem is the time allotment for administered loans. Loans are extremely short term (in 1993 all bank loans were for a maximum of one year) which made repayment difficult under such deadlines. Borrowing money for fashionable consumer goods like a Honda Dream II motorcycle is difficult enough, let alone the more obvious problem of repaying long term loans on equipment and machinery. Consequently, some business expenses must be absorbed in other ways and start-up capital is often accumulated through the combined use of many sources. Data from the study collected for this paper shows this pattern. The women surveyed were asked where they got the money they used to begin their own business. This question was designed to determine if many women borrow from multiple sources versus one source.

It was also designed to explore which support systems are most commonly used for financial help. The question was multiple choice with six answers to choose from. Answer number six, "other", although not asked to name, may in some cases be informal lenders or loan sharks.

Table 4-9 ACCESSING CAPITAL FOR BUSINESS PURPOSES

	Tan Binh	Phung Hung
Borrowed from 1 source	45.2 %	52.8 %
Borrowed from 2 sources	49.0 %	41.5 %
Borrowed from 3+ sources	5.6 %	0

Table 4-10 MAIN SOURCES OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT

	Tan Binh	Phung Hung
1. Immediate family	96.2 %	78.3 %
2. State lending institution/program	9.4 %	18.8 %
3. Friends	7.5 %	9.4 %
4. Relatives	32.0 %	7.5 %
5. Overseas relatives	3.7 %	3.7 %
6. Other	13.2 %	18.8 %

The results show that the women are evenly spread between borrowing from one, and more than one source. Immediate family, not surprisingly, was the primary lending source. There was a higher incidence of women in Phung Hung Market having borrowed from a State lending institution, although the overall percentage is still below twenty percent. A higher percentage of women in Tan Binh turned to local relatives for money.

The economic renovation policies in Vietnam have attempted to address the country's virtually non-existent financial sector. The thrust of the banking reform has been liberalization and decentralization, but getting to where they need to go will take time (ILO, 1993). The restructuring of the banking system is a necessary priority of the government during times of rapid change. Years of economic hardship and a seriously devalued currency have fostered a lack of trust in the Vietnamese Dong. Vietnamese people have come to rely on gold as a means of savings and the U.S. dollar as a common means of exchange. Everyone from informal vendors to small, medium, and large business owners to ethnic minority people in Sapa will accept the U.S. dollar without hesitation.¹⁵ The Vietnamese Dong has become stronger with recent macroeconomic stabilizing policies, but the cautious habits of the people remain.

The banking system is critical for enterprise development. The multi sector economy that is growing stronger with economic renovation needs the support of a solid financial sector if Vietnam wants to continue its economic transition at the current pace. According to the ILO, recent surveys of the private sector indicate that a shortage of capital is still one of the biggest constraints to enterprise expansion and growth (ILO, 1993:27). In the absence of an adequate banking infrastructure, the private sector must rely on personal funds for development and expansion. The study of self-employed women in the marketplace in Vietnam explored patterns of accessing money for business capital to see how it parallels national credit patterns. The findings showed that women had to mobilize money from numerous sources to go into business. Although some borrowed from banks, it was a small percentage of the total.

¹⁵ Sapa is a mountain village in northwestern Vietnam between Laos and China. Close to the boarder of China. Known for its multitude of ethnic people, particularly the H'Mong people,

CREDIT SCHEMES FOR WOMEN IN VIETNAM

The most successful micro credit schemes that have been utilized by women in Vietnam are the ones that allow alternate forms of collateral. For reasons common in developing countries, women in Vietnam often lack formal collateral such as land titles or assets. Yet it is not surprising that women in Vietnam have proven themselves credit worthy and reliable in their agreements to pay back loans when given the opportunity. Credit schemes for women are currently being administered through a number of different channels. The FAO/UNFPA has a guarantee fund scheme managed through the regular banking operations for rural women. These loans are administered via a partnership with the Women's Union and the Viet Nam Bank of Agriculture. The Vietnamese Government also distributes loans, such as the National Employment Fund, described in Chapter Two.

There are approximately 200 international non-Governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Vietnam, but only 50 of them have been identified as having significant development roles (NGO Directory, 1995/96). An even smaller portion of that number has some type of credit/income generating arm to their programs. The majority of the NGOs focus their lending in rural areas, and generally they work through the Farmer's Union, the Women's Union and the Youth Union in distributing and monitoring loans. Local partners are a crucial and necessary marriage for NGOs in Vietnam. All foreign NGOs and their projects are monitored by the People's Aid Coordination Committee (PACCOM), a government agency established in 1989 for the purpose of coordinating NGO projects and linking organizations with local authorities. They usually require the involvement of a local Vietnamese partner in project execution.

Credit schemes and income generation programs are administered by international NGOs in different forms. Some examples of activities developed to support income generation include:

- credit and loans
- establishing commune level financial institutions
- formation of savings and credit groups
- revolving funds
- integrated development programs
- establishment of enterprises: crops, aquaculture, handicrafts, animal husbandry, etc.
- training - vocational and business
- advocacy for partner institutions
- technical assistance in production
- project monitoring
- women's cooperatives
- market research

The women who were interviewed in the two urban marketplaces had the opportunity to express their present and future concerns about their job in an open ended question (#18 on survey). For example, in Tan Binh Marketplace a number of women mentioned the frequent change in taxes as a concern for their future. Other women mentioned that their children were having difficulties finding employment, which concerned them. Some women also added superfluous information in other questions asked during their interviews with the sociologists. An example of this was that a husband had died, making life more difficult, or that a child had gotten married and was no longer around to help with housework.

The following figures show photographic examples of marketplaces and marketplace activity in Vietnam. The figures represent large covered marketplaces in Ho Chi Minh City, as well as street marketplaces which operate in the open air. Figures 3 and 4 are large, indoor marketplaces. Figures 5 and 6 are outdoor marketplaces. The street marketplace shown in figure 5, indicates that outdoor

markets can vary in size and number of stalls to ones as expansive as the marketplace on Co Giang Street in District 1 of Ho Chi Minh City. Photographs of marketplace women are shown in figures 7 and 8.

Figure 3 Tan Binh Marketplace. Large indoor marketplace housing over 2,000 stalls.



Figure 4 Xom Cui Marketplace. Large indoor marketplace located in District 4. Many of the women sellers interviewed conducted business with middlemen from Xom Cui Marketplace.



Figure 5 Co Giang Marketplace. Outdoor street market in District 1.



Figure 6 Co Giang Marketplace

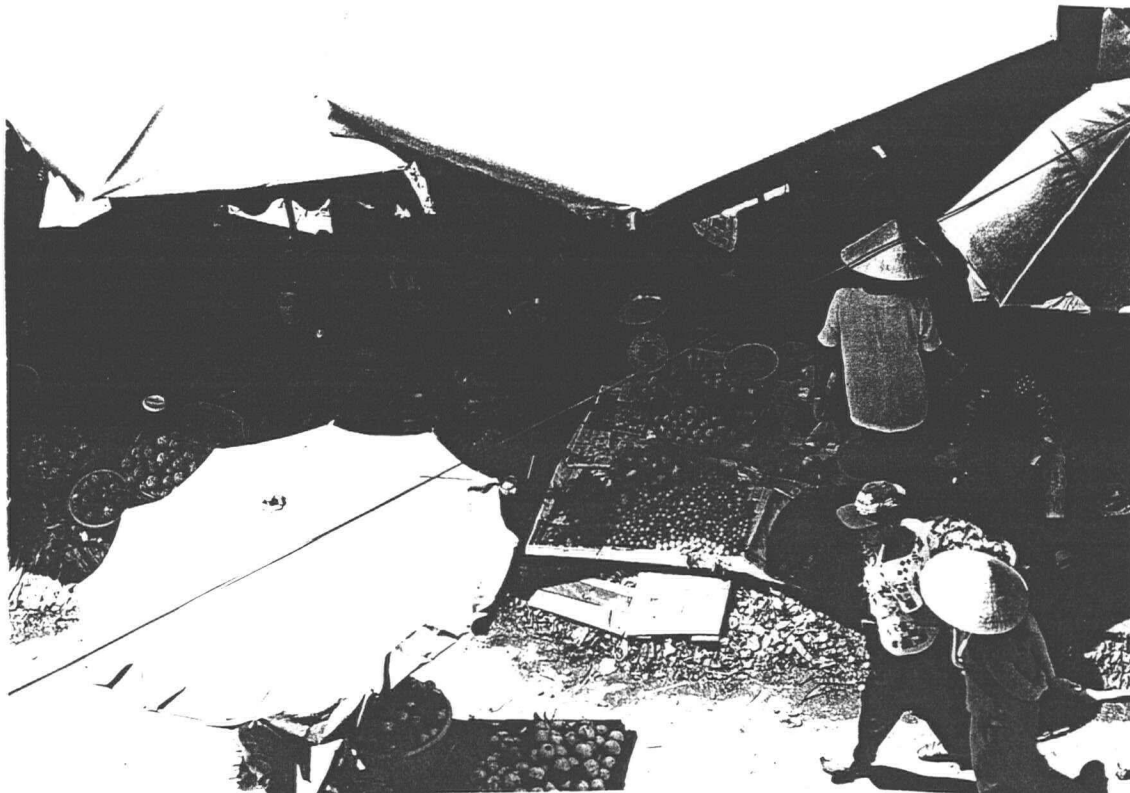


Figure 7

Woman marketplace seller.

Seller of duck chicks.



Figure 8

Woman marketplace seller.

Seller of cooked/prepared foods.



PART 2 EXTERNAL INTERVIEWS

External interviews were conducted to acquire more information about the formal marketplace system and its governmental oversight. In order to better understand the system within which the sellers interviewed work, an informal questionnaire was asked to market managers in Tan Binh Market. This was done to get their perspective on the marketplace system as well as to find out basic information about taxes, administration, and organizational structures of Vietnam's Government run marketplaces. The following section is a compilation of the information that was gathered about marketplaces in Ho Chi Minh City. A copy of the questionnaire given to marketplace managers can be found in the appendix. External interviews involved more open discussion than the interviews with marketplace sellers.

Institutional framework of government in Ho Chi Minh City

Interviews with market managers explained the administrative and institutional foundation of Ho Chi Minh City. There are various central ministries and institutions in Vietnam that have a supervisory role for the urban sector in terms of policy, planning, and programming. In Ho Chi Minh City, the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee (HCMC PC) is the agency responsible at the local government level. Ho Chi Minh City is organized into districts and wards. There are twelve inner districts within which there are 182 wards and six outer districts which contain 95 wards plus dependent towns.

There are three levels of local government: (1) the HCMC PC, (2) 18 district people's committees, and (3) the people's committees for 281 wards, communes and town lets. The HCMC PC is

presided over by a chairman and four vice chairmen organized along functional lines: (I) economic relations and activities, (ii) construction and urban infrastructure, (iii) culture, technology and science, and (iv) agricultural development. The chairman and vice chairman supervise 22 line departments and assorted boards and advisory agencies. With some exceptions, the district and ward/commune levels are responsible for day-to-day administrative management of the communities under their jurisdiction.

Organizational Structure of Marketplaces

Markets in Vietnam range in size. Some are in specially built marketplaces, housing over 2,000 stalls with sanitation, security, electricity, water, and other amenities. Others exist in small alleys away from the main traffic and lack all amenities, including coverage from the sun. No matter what size, markets are managed by a market manager, or management board for the large markets. The managers are responsible for overseeing taxes and rents. In the larger markets, they are also responsible for managing the provision of water, security, sanitation, and electricity. They must alert the sellers of any new policies affecting markets or traders, and of any changes in taxes.

In Ho Chi Minh City there are currently 78 large markets total in the 12 districts. These totals include only the large inside markets, not the medium or small street markets. The break down is as follows¹⁶:

¹⁶ From the statistical department in Ho Chi Minh City, June 1996.

Table 4-11 THE NUMBER OF LARGE MARKETS IN EACH DISTRICT

District	1	3	4	5	6	8	10	11	GoVap	Phu Nhuan	Tan Binh	Binh Thanh
Large Markets	7	4	8	12	5	11	2	5	5	2	13	4

BENEFITS OF WORKING IN THE MARKETPLACE

The idea of entering into the field of trade is enticing for women for a number of reasons. Becoming active in trade opens a window of opportunity for wealth, which in turn opens doors to new found sociopolitical status. Wealth, however, is not the only connection between the marketplace and power. There is a political energy within the marketplace: "It is the place where the bulk of the community wealth circulates" (House-Midamba, 1995:91). The marketplace is part of local and national politics, not only because of its economic influence, but also for its communication and social functions. The political class is naturally interested in the marketplace because it is a place to collect revenues, benefit from corruption, and exercise power. It is also interested in the communication and social capabilities of the marketplace because it serves as a venue for political propaganda and potential collaboration. Yet in all of these facets, the target is the market women. The incorporation of women into political constituencies around the world has been recognized by early political parties, women's unions, and youth unions. In Ho Chi Minh City, the Women's Union has a significant representation in marketplace organizations.¹⁷

¹⁷ Interviews in Ho Chi Minh City, March- June 1996.

Women have used various organizational means to secure a place in the internal workings of the marketplace. Traders associations and guilds are common in marketplaces. A guild is formed by traders dealing in a similar commodity. In Ho Chi Minh City, associations are also formed among sellers of a common commodity, such as shoes or electronics. Although unbeknownst to the common shopper, these associations work to dominate market space to maximize gains, create order, and to keep a stronghold in market politics (Falola, 1995:30). A guild executive often acts as spokesman and negotiator for the group, admitting new members and discussing issues relating to pricing and market administration. In the Ho Chi Minh City markets studied, the association's executive or spokeswoman was the representative at all market management meetings and relayed complaints to the administration on behalf of the group. The spokeswoman likewise informed the seller about any tax changes, policy changes, or management issues laid out by the administration to the traders in their guild.¹⁸

Investigation into the various organizational means of marketplace sellers and marketplace managers found that the sellers are better organized at the grassroots level for communicating with one another than the marketplace managers. Once the network of associations was realized among marketplace sellers, similar questions were asked of marketplace managers to determine how much contact and communication they have with other marketplaces in Ho Chi Minh City of similar size and management. Responses from the managers interviewed were that they rarely meet with other marketplace managers in the city. Unless a meeting is called by the People's Committee of Ho Chi

¹⁸ Interviews with sellers and market managers in Phung Hung and Tan Binh markets, June 1996.

Minh City for the district level marketplace managers to meet, they do not communicate with one another on daily business, management, or tax collection.

Women are organized at the marketplace level, but market administration is still dominated by men at the local and national level. This constructs a top down political structure within which the women traders work. However, it should not be assumed that the women who work in the marketplace lack political control. Toyin Falola in her study of Yoruba market women in African explains how women secure a stronghold in the larger political system vis-à-vis the marketplace:

If the established political order dominated by men assumes that it can freely manipulate the marketplace and women traders through women's association and leadership, it is wrong. These women also manipulate prominent men and political order, seeking the extension of their influence. The subject of female manipulation requires more treatment than is possible here, but its mechanism can be highlighted briefly. Prominent male members are incorporated into market organizations through offices and honorary titles. Men are appointed as honorary consuls and to functional positions such as secretary or treasurer. These appointments are no indication that women could not perform these tasks or manage their affairs, but they are clever ways of forging alliances with men. Incorporated male members and others are expected to deliver crucial linkages with power, authority, resources, and groups external to the market in way defined or suggested by the women (Falola, 1995: 31).

TAXES AND ADMINISTRATION

The People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City sets the overall amount to be collected annually in "income taxes" (tax on profit from sales) for marketplaces to reach the city's budget. Income tax is

collected by a tax agency at the district level, and the district tax agency reports directly to the city's People's Committee. Payment schedule is quarterly. All other taxes are collected by the management committee of the market, which the managers decide on at the district and ward level.

Rent agreements and leases for sellers vary according to the size of the market. In the smallest markets, rents may be paid monthly by a leasee for a spot on the street to sell with no security of tenure. In the large markets, leases are sold, usually on a 15 year basis with fifty percent paid up front and the rest paid in installments. Subleases are possible after making a formal application to the market management board and receiving approval. The variance in lease is basically the long term lease option verses short term rental without security.

Tan Binh Market has over 2,000 stalls and exemplifies one of the more complex taxation systems in market management because of its size. Fees are collected in the following categories:

- income tax (called "profit tax" in Vietnamese)
- sanitation fee, cleaning
- security fee
- fee to rent location
- toilet use
- electricity
- water

Not all markets have the same breakdown of fees for the sellers however. Outdoor markets may not have the luxury of toilets or cleaning people to take away their waste, which means they must be responsible for sweeping their waste into the street for the night cleaners to pick up. The closed markets are not in direct contact with the street cleaners and since they are usually much larger collections of sellers, it is important to have sufficient sanitation in large, hot, closed building or

serious health problems will follow. The market management sees to this operation and charges the sellers a sanitation fee as they see fit. Security is another issue that varies from indoor and outdoor markets. The open air sellers rarely pay a fee for security. In the closed markets however the sellers leave their products in their rented stalls overnight and are therefore more concerned about night security and more willing to pay that fee. Security fee in Tan Binh Market for each seller is determined according to their product.

Certain sellers pay special fees or higher fees for electricity or water according to their product. Women who sell fish are an example of a type of seller who require running water to keep their product fresh. Of course there are outdoor sellers who do not have this luxury and must keep a bucket of water nearby. But where possible, these sellers will pay the extra fee to have access to running water. The following table shows some of the basic variances between fees paid by small traders selling in indoor and outdoor markets.

Table 4-12 FEES PAID BY MARKET TRADERS IN HO CHI MINH CITY¹⁹

Kind of fee	Traders in an indoor market	Traders in an outdoor market
income tax on sales	x	x
night guard	x	
electricity	x	
sanitation/cleaning	x	
toilet	x	x
deposit on stall - (not a lease)		x
water consumption fee		x

¹⁹ * Vietnamese newspaper *Tuoi Tre*, Article "Thue Cho - bao gio bo le", (April 10, 1996) page 6+.

Note: The "deposit on stall" fee acts like a damage deposit to my understanding. There is no actual lease, the traders rent it month to month and the money is returned once the location is forfeited and inspected.

Taxes are a source of dissatisfaction for the market sellers who complain of unpredictable tax changes and unreasonable fees paid on profits. The tax system in Vietnam is complex, and inefficient. Voluntary compliance is low and collection is inconsistent. The International Labor Office attributes this to "the government's weak ability to accurately assess the incomes and profits of individuals and economic units" (ILO, 1993: 29). A tax reform package was introduced in 1989 in an attempt to create new sources of revenue and improve revenue collection. It also set out to implement equal treatment towards State and non-State sectors. Some old tax categories (e.g., turnover, profit, and excise taxes) were modified and new categories were introduced (e.g., the natural resources tax and personal income tax).

The inefficiency of the tax system explains why the government, like the market sellers, is dissatisfied by its gross revenue in tax collection. The following table shows how the amount of taxes set by the government as a quota to be collected and the actual amount "in hand" that is collected at different time periods.²⁰ The actual collection is off setting the governmental budget.

Note: Approximate exchange rate: \$1 USD = 11,000 VN Dong (in the first quarter of 1996)

\$100 USD = 1,100,000 VN Dong

²⁰ * Vietnamese newspaper *Tuoi Tre*. Article "Thue Cho - bao gio bo le", (April 10, 1996) page 6+.

Table 4- 13 GOVERNMENT TAXES FOR MARKETPLACES IN HCMC

Time period	Target assigned	Actual amount collected	Percent of target achieved
Total for 1995	950 million dong VN (approx \$86,363 US)	844.6 million dong	89%
Fourth quarter 1995	310 mil dong (\$28,182 US)	201 mil. dong	65%
December 1995	110 mil. dong (\$ 10,000 US)	80 mil. dong	72%
January 1996	120 mil. dong (\$10,909 US)	65 mil. dong	54%

Why then is the actual collection of market taxes lower than the targeted amount set by the government? The government's tendency is to collect from everywhere under formal regulations to balance its budget. Yet the window of subjectivity and negotiation between levels of government, as well as between sellers and tax collectors, offsets any hope of collecting the set tax amounts. Hence, there is a continuing increase in the overall tax amount to be collected at the district level to make up for the diminishing total returns. The following tax categories are active in Vietnam (ILO 1993):

1. **Turnover tax** - a business income tax that is applied to all businesses, except those engaged in agricultural production, export goods and products subject to consumption taxes. This category is subdivided into two basic categories with rates of 1-10 percent (applied to most businesses) and 30-40 percent.

2. **Profit tax** - applied to all businesses, except those covered by the Foreign Investment Law and the agricultural tax. Rates are 30 percent for heavy industry, 40 percent for light industries, and 50 percent for services.
3. **Sales tax** - on selected products such as tobacco and alcohol.
4. **Income tax** - a progressive tax with a maximum of 50 percent. The cause of most dissatisfaction due to its complexity.

The tax most subject to change is the income tax paid on seller's profit from sales. The income tax is collected by a tax agency at the district level. Because the People's Committee sets the overall amount to be collected, the method of collection is left somewhat to the discretion of the managers at the district and ward level. The district tax agency reports to the city's People's Committee. Payment schedules are quarterly. Abuses are reported in many tax categories. Problems related to assessment and collection of taxes from the small scale private sector draw a lot of attention. Small enterprises complain of harassment from the tax department in connection with collection practices. However, due to the simplicity of the system of accounting, tax evasion can happen at many levels. For example, the seller may falsely reduce the size of real profit made to lower his/her income tax, or they may define the size of their business inaccurately, therefore under counting their sales. There is the potential for market managers and tax collection agents to falsely calculate a traders tax or total income for under the table money that benefits both parties. Hence, the actual amounts collected do not equal the targets set.

There is not enough transparency in the system as it exists now to ensure fair collection practices. Auditing of markets does occur, especially in the larger markets, according to a schedule. In Tan Binh Market, the financial department audits the market once a year. Most auditing activities are conducted by the market management board, which is an apparent blessing to anyone participating in corruption or tax evasion at the management level.

CONCLUSION

The marketplace system in Vietnam has participation from all levels of government. Tax revenue from marketplace trade contributes significantly to the urban economy. Identifying the taxes that the marketplace women pay and the system they operate within is an important step to understanding what hampers and enables business practice for women in micro-enterprises in Ho Chi Minh City. Unfortunately, the tax collection system as it stands now is too prone to corruption in Vietnam. At the marketplace level, sellers and marketplace managers are capable of negotiating alterations to their tax payments, and are motivated to do so because they feel the taxes are too high. At the larger governmental level, the imbalance between the set tax targets and actual amounts collected are resulting in a constant raise in taxes, which cause serious dissatisfaction among marketplace sellers who have difficulties in predicting their tax payments from month to month. Sellers fear the lack of control and foresight they have in tax collection that is related to businesses.

Despite the dissatisfaction women marketplace sellers feel about government taxes, they are a valuable part of the urban economy. Women sellers are savvy business people, who invest long hours in their businesses. They find multiple ways to access business capital in a country that has an

insufficient banking system and inadequate loan programs. Women sellers are involved in business networks that tie manufacturers, middlemen, international producers, and rural suppliers together in the marketplace setting. Women in the marketplace are organized into groups with spokespeople, and they are known to support one another in times of sickness, hardship, or personal dilemma. Interviews in Ho Chi Minh City found that marketplace women have personal histories of trade and business, that outlive the government renovation policies of 1986 which formally accepted private sector activity in Vietnam. Marketplace sellers are for the most part career positions, which do their best to survive through good and bad economic cycles.

The determination of Vietnamese women to generate income for themselves and their households was apparent in this study when examining their personal backgrounds. An overwhelming majority of the women sellers interviewed claimed themselves as the main income earner in their household. The mature ages of some of the women in Phung Hung Marketplace supports the ongoing determination of women to provide for their families and households. The varied educational attainment of the women surveyed shows that women with both accelerated educations and remedial educations are motivated to work as self-employed business women. The characteristics of this group of working women offer clues to what people are willing to sacrifice to generate income and to remain self-sufficient in an ever-changing and insecure economic environment. Micro enterprises and small-scale business activities are an important part of the larger business system in Vietnam. In order to achieve sustainable economic growth, a better understanding of this group and its need for successful development is necessary.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION

This study was formulated within the larger framework of economic transition in Vietnam and its influence on the economic livelihood of women for the future. Vietnam's economic renovation policies have encouraged rapid growth in all sectors of the economy, yet a number of factors have simultaneous juxtaposed high rates of unemployment and displaced workers with economic growth. Given the larger picture, women taking the initiative to join the private sector as small scale entrepreneurs are an important aspect of macro economic development in Vietnam. Women constitute over fifty percent of the total population, over half the number of workers between the ages of 16 to 55, have a high literacy rate and have historically played an active role in the work force under communism. By all accounts, women are paramount to developing a stable macro economy and solid workforce.

Current information on women's participation in the workforce shows that women are concentrated in the lower rungs of the occupations scale and are in non-decision-making positions. They face more health hazards than men because of child bearing, heavy physical work, and high risk jobs involving chemicals and solid waste. With the onset of economic renovation policies, an income gap is growing between the rich and poor and between rural and urban areas. Gender related discrimination in the work force is more prevalent now than it was under an undisturbed centrally planned Communist system.

Today, more opportunities in the private sector are available to women. Hypothetically, all people in Vietnam have equal right and access to new business opportunities. Given that higher levels of education and comprehensive health care are known to positively affect employment opportunities and economic stability for women, the threat of marginalizing women and inhibiting their access to these building blocks has generational implications. Socialist countries have obtained impressive levels of female education and skill. In the face of economic transition, employment trends and gender are crucial factors to consider to avoiding socioeconomic problems down the road.

The results of this study find that women working in the marketplaces of Ho Chi Minh City are involved in complex social, political and economic networks and enjoy working privately in the field of trade and commerce. More crucial to the macro economic development of Vietnam, this study concludes that women sellers and traders contribute significantly to their household economies. Discouraging their economic activity through unpredictable tax changes, corruption and inflexible regulations will negatively impact upon a network of children, elderly parents, and unemployed family members. As it stands now, taking an antipoverty approach to women and poverty by focusing on employment and income-generating options is important to continuing women's economic development in Vietnam.

Credit is the most obvious hindrance for this segment of the work force. The women interviewed borrowed almost exclusively from private sources. A combination of personal lending sources were often used. This serves to put an unnecessary drain on national savings. Women have difficulties in expanding their businesses due to a lack of available capital as well. Unless small -scale and micro-

enterprises are able to expand their overall profit level, then employment capabilities are limited. Sustainable economic development requires the current micro-enterprises, both urban and rural, to be able to expand and integrate into the large business continuum allowing for new micro enterprises to sprout up in their place.

Marketing and the ability to access product information from the outside world is also needed by this segment of the private sector. Accessing information about new products and how to market Vietnamese items overseas would aid in the expansion of existing micro-enterprises. Accessing products and technology from overseas is important for expansion and for the start up of new cooperatives in rural areas. As the situation exists now, women marketplace sellers in the smaller marketplaces seem to be less privy to information about goods and marketing techniques.

Finally, the decision-making capabilities of entrepreneurial women in Vietnam may become threatened by the development of new urban supermarkets. If the trend continues to build western-style supermarkets, women may become gradually edged out of the larger, more profitable and international shopping centers in Vietnam. This would decrease both their level of decision making and competitiveness in the marketplace setting.

POLICY SUGGESTIONS

A few suggestions regarding policy will be offered in this section from the analysis of the study conducted of marketplace women in Ho Chi Minh City. A close relationship exists between high levels of unemployment, widespread poverty, and unequal distribution of income; therefore, the policy suggestions offered here are intended to aid sustainable economic growth and social development for Vietnam. Employment is an essential component of any development strategy, which is why the acceptance and nurturing of existing, productive employment, such as that found in urban marketplaces, is considered so important.

1. Gender Sensitive Planning

Some of the obstacles women in Vietnam face have been highlighted in this paper. It is necessary to address these issues at a policy level, in order to promote the most productive and socially beneficial form of economic development. Gender sensitive planning would recognize the many roles of women in Vietnamese society, as well as the impacts that certain programs have on women.

In terms of employment, gender sensitive planning would distinguish among mainstream development efforts, which may be gender neutral, programs which require specific alterations to ensure that the need of women are considered, and policies/programs which are considerate of the more vulnerable groups of women (e.g., ethnic minorities, the handicapped, workers in hazardous jobs) (ILO, 1993:110). Training programs for women should be flexible and organized to accommodate the busy schedules of women who juggle household responsibilities and full time jobs.

2. Sustainable Private Sector Development

Suggestions on the development of the private sector are to recognize and aid the smaller forms of private sector activity, so as to ensure integrated economic growth. Vietnam's economic renovation policies are zealously looking towards large scale investment for growth. The role of foreign investment has changed drastically in recent years with the new Foreign Investment Law and the attraction of huge foreign companies and development projects. In the wake of this large scale economic movement the smaller players in Vietnam's emerging private sector should not be forgotten. Unless medium and small-scale enterprises are able to grow in unison with large business ventures, a strong and sustainable economic continuum will not develop in Vietnam.

Strategies for aiding small scale enterprises should most definitely include financing schemes for businesses. Taxes on new large scale investments, could be recirculated in a fund for small business loans. Likewise, more attention should be paid to aiding business expansion. There is a bottle neck of micro enterprises/household enterprises which operate with only one employee, but exist for years without growth. Introducing more programs in training, marketing, business management, business cooperation , etc., may aid in the growth of small, stagnant businesses. For example, an expansion opportunity for a seller occupying an indoor marketplace stall could eventually allow the seller to move into a privately rented commercial space in a building, thus opening new opportunities and space in the indoor marketplace for a businesses currently in a small street marketplace stall. Expansion serves to continue a natural progression of business and increases employment opportunities for others.

3. Education and Health

The education and health care systems are changing in Vietnam with economic renovation. Although many of the changes are positive, the quality of these services is increasing, access for poorer people is becoming more expensive, and thus more problematic. As a result of the changes to health care and education, drop out rates among girls and boys of school age are increasing. Different trends are emerging for boys and girls, which is the most worrisome aspect of these changes. Given that there is a positive correlation between a person's level of education and his/her lifetime earnings, the increase in drop out rates for girls predicts a grim future for them economically. The effects of the current changes and trends on women's health and educational attainment will become more apparent generations down the road, but the negative repercussions will be far more difficult to address. Therefore, formulating strategies to tackle these issues now are necessary.

In terms of education, suggestions include providing incentives in perhaps, the form of income tax breaks for poorer families who keep their children in school. Since the private cost of primary education for poor families is so high, particularly when the opportunity cost of a child's labor is forgone during school years, they are more apt to pull their children out of school at earlier ages. It is important to encourage education in order to achieve long term economic and social development.

4. Physical Planning and Marketplaces

Trends for marketplace development in urban Vietnam are changing and women may be adversely affected in the future. Both consumers and developers in Vietnam are looking to more supermarket style marketplaces, which are more upscale than current marketplaces. If this trend increases, women may be edged out of supermarket stores because of the high capital investment required. This would decrease both their competitiveness business and their personal decision making power.

Trends towards larger, fancier marketplaces may also impact women marketplace sellers. As development continues in Ho Chi Minh City and more urban space is needed for building, some street marketplaces may close, which would be costly to the lower-income, often older and less educated sellers operating in the streets. This would be detrimental in a number of obvious ways. Likewise, if the trend to build larger marketplaces that attract people from greater distances for shopping, the smaller marketplaces will become less functional, arterials roads will exceed capacity and other urban problems will be compounded.

5. The Role of International Non-Governmental Organizations

The role of NGOs based in Vietnam is essential to women. Many of the programs developed and initiated by NGOs focus on child care, health and welfare, credit and loan programs for women, and training for home-based or micro business and cooperatives. NGOs fill a needed gap in services to the poor, in addition to offering progressive training programs.

In Vietnam, the control over NGOs and NGO programs is strict. Interviews with members of NGOs operating in Vietnam found that program flexibility is difficult, and daily formalities required by the governmental bureaucracy are time consuming and cumbersome. It is relatively difficult for new NGOs to set up representative offices in Vietnam. It is equally as difficult and frustrating to work to full capacity once a presence is established.

Nevertheless, the presence of NGOs in Vietnam is pertinent to serving some of the most vulnerable groups in need. Street children, AIDS patients, prostitutes, ethnic minorities in the highlands, the handicapped, and the impoverished benefit enormously from any help they receive in kind. In addition, NGOs may contribute to research or international information on urban problems or issues special to Vietnam. This is important to attracting attention to Vietnam and its needs.

Suggestions in terms of NGOs are to introduce more lenient and accepting policies towards international non-governmental organizations and international aid agencies. The focus has been on attracting foreign investors with new renovation policies, however, the investment made by foreign aid and non profit organizations is equally as valuable to achieving long term goals of social welfare and economic development.

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Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE 1 :
ADMINISTERED TO WOMEN MARKETPLACE SELLERS

Name

Age

Type of business/ product sold

Promity of stall within marketplace

1. Are you the owner and primary operator of this business?

yes

no

2. When did you begin this particular business? year _____

3. Who decides where and what to sell in this business?

She

Husband

Parents

Other _____

4. Does anyone help you in this business that you pay a salary to?

yes

no

If so, whom?

Family member

Friend

Other _____

5. Who is the primary manager of daily income/profits/revenue?

She

Husband

Parents

Other _____

6. Why did you choose this business?

Because I don't know anything else

It required low capital investment

Family does this business

The working hours are flexible

Other _____

7. Other than this location, do you engage in any other business? Where?

8. Besides this business, from 1995 until now, have you done or do any other jobs for income?

Every now and then

Frequently

No

9. Where do you buy your goods?

From another market

From a friend of other seller

From a wholeseller/distributor

Other

Appendix 2

QUESTIONNAIRE 2
MARKET MANAGEMENT

Questionnaire: asked to the managers of Tan Binh Market

1. What year did the ownership change from State to Private?
2. How many business stalls exist in Tan Binh Market?
3. Taxes: What taxes are paid by the trades in this marketplace. Describe.
4. How often are taxes paid?
5. What taxes are left to the district and ward level administration to decide on?
6. How often do taxes change? What taxes change most frequently?
7. Do the market managers meet with the managers of other markets to discuss common business and management matters?
8. Do the business owners have any kind of business organization that they participate in?
9. Does anyone from the Government come to the market to audit the businesses on a regular basis?
10. How stable is the business ownership? Can tenants transfer their leases?
11. Are there any regularly organized meetings between the manager and business people?
12. Who deals with problems like theft and safety in the marketplace?

Appendix 3

QUESTIONNAIRE 3:
PROFESSIONALS AND ACADEMICS IN HO CHI MINH CITY

1. Are you aware of any research that has been done thus far in Vietnam on women working in marketplaces?
2. What have been the advantages and disadvantages of doi moi in terms of expanding employment opportunities for urban women working at the small-scale and household economic level?
3. Do you think the economic renovation policies are helping women or further complicating their chances of employment and social welfare?
4. What do you see as the main barriers for women today?
5. What do you see as the role for NGO's in expanding employment opportunities for women in self-employment?
6. What do you see as the role for Governmental institutions and social organizations in expanding employment opportunities for women in self-employment?
7. What gaps do NGO's fill in Vietnam outside of Government programs? Will NGO's expand or decrease their overall involvement in the future?

Appendix 4

LIST OF BUSINESSES RUN BY WOMEN INTERVIEWED

Phung Hung Market District 5

Tan Binh Market District Tan Binh

	<i>number</i>		<i>number</i>
Footware	1	Footwear	12
Fresh vegetables	13	Watches	7
Fresh Fruit	5	Hats	1
Cosmetics	1	Cosmetics, plus	7
Desserts: sweet drinks and cakes	6	Desserts	1
Drinks	1	Drinks	7
Fish, crabs, shrimp, etc	9	Blankets & Mosq nets	2
Miscalaneous items	1	Clothes	9
Cookware, utensiles	4	Uncut Material	2
Prepared food & soups	3	Prepared food & soups	4
Meat	3	Music: tapes and Cds	1
Fresh Flowers	1		
Misc. dried foods and seasonings	3		
Traditional medicine	1		

Appendix 5

MOLISA ORGANIZATIONAL CHART

