

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam

United Nations Delegation to the Commission on the Status of Women

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# Introduction

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam strongly believes that to further progress global society, the United Nations must persist in efforts to elevate the status of women. The elevation of women to equal standing with men will come at no detriment to males but rather with benefits to all. Nations that lift restrictions on women have increased economic growth, more diversified business activity, a larger labour market, healthier citizens, stronger families, increased productivity and rapid socially progressive development. As a rapidly advancing nation, Vietnam sees incredible potential in all of its citizens and wishes to break down any barriers that would prevent women from participating in Vietnamese culture, society or economy. To transform our nation into a modern industrialised state, Vietnam believes that it must enable and promote women across all aspects of society so as to unlock Vietnam’s true potential. Together the state and the people of Vietnam will work together to create a society of equality and development that will launch Vietnam into the 21st century as a pioneer of social progress.

# Women & Sustainability

Vietnam has experienced rapid economic development over the past several decades at the expense of the environment and consequently rural women. As Vietnam nears its goal of becoming a developed nation by 2030, the state of rural women’s relationship with the environment must be reassessed so as to involve rural women in the development of the nation and improve their protection from environmental changes. As women make up a majority of Vietnam’s agricultural workforce, they are the key to providing a sustainable future Vietnam.

Vietnamese women are a critical part the agricultural industry in Vietnam as 68% of all women in Vietnam are employed in the agricultural workforce. In recent years, the Vietnamese government has made many efforts to expand the agricultural sector by promoting rural women and creating opportunities for women to succeed. Approving the Project on Vocational Training for Rural Laborers, setting up local clubs to encourage female entrepreneurship and passing legislature such as the National Strategy on Gender Equality are all efforts to improve female participation and skill in the agriculture industry. Furthermore, it has been shown through several studies that *“if rural women are given equal access to productive resources as men, the world’s agriculture output could increase by 30% and the poverty rate could fall by 17%”*. Vietnam believes that by empowering women in rural communities it can achieve the sustainable development goals well ahead of schedule. Improving access to resources such as credit and land allows women to develop local businesses and provide unique dynamics to the world of business. Vietnam has previously taken action by increasing women’s access to credit through the Vietnam Social Policy Bank and equalizing the land rights of men and women in the 2006 Law on Gender Equality. Through the promotional efforts and removal of restrictions on rural women in Vietnam the agriculture sector will thrive and with it, Vietnam.

Food security is an issue that Vietnam has successfully overcome. The Global Food Security index has given Vietnam a 57.1 score for food security. The government finds this score to be very impressive and believes that Vietnamese women have made great contributions to achieving this rating. As women are the principle laborers in the agricultural sector they are the future of Vietnams food security and by improving their ability to work Vietnam can guarantee food security for generations to come. Changing laws around land rights to be less exclusive and discriminatory will allow more women to own land in Vietnam and will also empower women in agriculture. As more women create more productive farms, the food security and productivity of Vietnam will increase benefiting the entire nation.

As rural women make up a large part of the Vietnamese population, it is important that the government take into consideration their ideas and values. Improving access to government positions across Vietnam will allow rural women to help decide policies that will affect them the most, such as environmental policy. As a state subject to its people, Vietnam believes that action must be taken to include local rural women leaders on policy decisions that will directly affect them and their communities. Allowing more voices to be heard in politics only creates more angles of debate and will lead to a more well-rounded solution that benefits all.

The connection between rural women and sustainable development of the economy is very important. Vietnam believes that a plan involving the state and rural women is the best way to proceed when tackling the issues present in rural communities. Further promotion of women’s entrepreneurship through clubs, education and training programs will begin empowering rural women. Fundamental changes to the legislature surrounding access to resources for women will also aid in the development of local communities. Finally, the result of the aforementioned solution will be a stronger Vietnam that has rural women involved in government and strong food security.

# Elimination of Gender-Based Violence

Throughout the years, gender-based violence has plagued nations and the international community as a whole. As one of the most prevalent types human rights violations, it knows no social, economic and national bounds, undermining the health, dignity and security of women all around the world. Although much progress has been made in recent legislation gender-based violence is still at large in Vietnam. Vietnam is striving to improve women’s circumstances and encourages the international community to extend their support in ending gender-based violence.

Forceful child marriages are a major contributor to gender-based violence in Vietnam. However, Vietnam is well below the regional average for child marriages with only 11% of girls married by 18 compared to the regional average of 18% girls married before 18. The illegal practice mostly persists in remote rural areas of Vietnam where ethnic minorities can hide these crimes from the government. Vietnam does not recognize child marriages between citizens as the legal age for a woman to be eligible for marriage is 18. Furthermore, Vietnam also believes that child marriages are dangerous to the nation as children born from these marriages are far more likely to have defects or disabilities. The child marriages illegally taking place in remote communities seriously damage the economic potential of the communities and possibly Vietnam as a whole. Ending this practice is of the utmost importance if rural areas are to develop into the agricultural hubs that will fuel the nation.

Marital violence and assault is one of the most alarming areas of gender-based violence in Vietnam. Around 58% of Vietnamese women have experienced some form of physical, sexual or emotional violence in their lives. Vietnam recognizes that this is a ridiculously high number and the Vietnamese government is dedicated to reducing it to zero. Article 20 of the Constitution of Vietnam states that *“Everyone shall enjoy the inviolability of the individual and the legal protection of his or her life, health, honor and dignity and is protected against torture, violence, coercion, corporal punishment or any form of treatment harming his or her body and health and offence against honor and dignity.”*. There have also been legislative efforts to reduce marital violence such as the Law on Prevention and Control of Domestic Violence implemented in 2007 and government organizations, such as the Vietnams Women’s Union, have proactively led workshops and published reports on the status of domestic violence in Vietnam. However, these noble efforts have been difficult to implement as Vietnam lacks the funding necessary for many of these projects.

Female-infanticide is a form of gender-based violence that could undermine Vietnam's very future. In 2013 the sex ratio at birth for Vietnam was 113 boys to 100 girls and the gap has only widened since. As new technology, has enabled mothers and fathers to identify the sex of their children, more mothers are pressured by society to abort daughters in favour of sons. This pressure originates mostly from traditional ancestor worship religions in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government does believe that a large gender imbalance will be damaging to Vietnam's development and will be taking steps in the near future to combat this issue.

Any form of violence infringes on the fundamental rights of a human being. To prevent any further violence against our citizens, especially women, the Vietnamese government is prepared to undertake a gender equality programme that will increase awareness for gender-based violence. This should involve an active educational reform plan that will be used to educate men and women on the topic of gender-based violence. Opening channels of communication in local Vietnamese Women's Union organizations that will allow women to report crimes more easily. Providing legal support to women who report gender-based violence. Promoting the anti-gender-based-violence messages in mass media. Vietnam believes that undertaking these steps will help put an end to gender-based violence within Vietnam.

# Women in Education and Employment

Since its inception, Vietnam has been dedicated to the education of its citizens and the development of a highly skilled workforce. With the implementation of a large nation-wide public school system Vietnam’s literacy rates have risen to around 94% and school enrollment is among the highest in the world. Despite these amazing achievements many girls are still pressured out of school and do not continue their schooling past secondary education. When the girls leave school, they are often less educated than boys and therefore not able to compete for higher level positions in the economy. This societal pressure to remain in traditional female roles is a factor that must be accounted for when implementing legislature to keep girls in schools.

Vietnam’s education system is an incredibly successful and robust system. Spanning the entire nation, the education system provides quality education to the people of Vietnam. The Vietnamese government has invested billions into the education system as studies have shown that educated citizens provide massive economic benefits. As such, Vietnam educates all of its citizens to an equal degree. Article 61 of the constitution outlines the government policy towards education. *“The State shall … take care of pre-school education; guarantee compulsory primary education which is free of charge; gradually universalize secondary education; develop higher education and vocational education and provide an appropriate policy for scholarship and tuition.”.* Despite this nondiscriminatory policy in educational commitment there have been in the past aspects of gender streamlining in the education system. Gender stereotypes were portrayed in textbooks, males and females were pressured into certain careers and women were not encouraged to continue to higher levels of education. Vietnam believes that it has a very strong education system but also understands the need for improvements so as to allow women equal choice in their educational future.

After mandatory primary education is complete, many women particularly rural women, are pressured by family or society to leave school and begin work. Dropping out is incredibly destructive to a woman’s future prospects and therefore Vietnam’s future prospects. Keeping women in the education system longer has proven to raise a nation’s GNP up to 25% more than a nation who sheds women as they proceed through the system. Educating women also provides the benefits of smaller families, healthier communities and greater overall productivity. Vietnam does not support the destruction of women’s educational careers as the removal of women from the education system only damages the future economic capabilities of Vietnam.

Vietnamese women are some of the most economically involved women on the planet. 73% of women are part of the labor force which is 16% higher than the global average. Yet, women in Vietnam are continually unable to get into managing and decision making roles in the economy. This is partly due to a patriarchal tendency in Vietnamese society but mostly due to the demanding work hours of such positions. Vietnamese women are often unable to balance the demands of the workplace with family life and as such cannot fulfill directorial roles. Vietnam has taken actions to help women balance work and family by having a generous 5-month maternal and paternal leave, passing the National Strategy on Gender Equality and the 2012 labor act. With constructive legislation in place Vietnam believes that it can move forward to enforce legislation and create a better environment for women in the labor force. Having women in higher level managerial positions will help guide Vietnam into the future in a way that promotes women’s rights and needs.

Overall the Vietnamese government believes that it has avoided major gender hurdles in its education system by committing to a discrimination free system from its inception. However, the government does admit to having faults in the system and wants to remove gender streamline from education. A plan that includes review of textbooks for gender stereotypes, promoting women to administrative roles in education and financial support from the state to women who wish to continue their education would be highly favorable. Furthermore, the Vietnamese government has enacted legislation such as the Labor Act of 2012 and the National Strategy on Gender Equality and will be enforcing these acts in the near future with additional funding. Educating and employing women is of the utmost importance if Vietnam is to be an economically viable nation in the future.

# Conclusion

Although there are many challenges regarding the status of women in Vietnam, the government believes that continuing to promote women’s rights and expanding upon existing legislature is the way forward into a more equal future. From lack of access to land in rural regions to forceful child marriages and domestic abuse, Vietnamese women constantly face challenges to their basic human rights. Through enforcing equality legislation and further funding for gender equality projects in Vietnam, the state believes that it can create a nation where women are equal, respected and safe. Women are an integral part of the future of Vietnam, and to restrict their ability to pursue their dreams is to destroy the dream of a great Vietnam.

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