

**GENDER DIFFERENTIATED IMPACTS OF THE CHANGING
AGRICULTURAL POLICIES IN THE NORTH OF VIETNAM**

BUI THI LAN

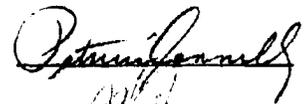
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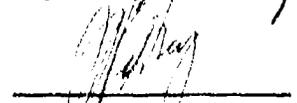
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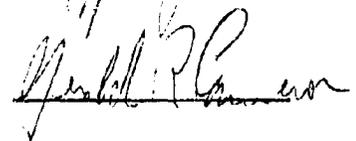
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ABSTRACT

GENDER DIFFERENTIATED IMPACTS OF CHANGING AGRICULTURAL POLICIES IN THE NORTH OF VIETNAM

Throughout the history of Vietnam, rural women have suffered greatly from either the feudal or colonialist regime. After August 1945, the role and position of women changed radically. With agricultural collectivization in the North in the 1960s, rural women became cooperative members on equal footing with men in almost all collective work and with respect to income. However, the collective production mechanism could not satisfy their basic needs. Then came the agricultural renovation officially initiated in 1987. The results of the changing agricultural policies were spectacular and immediate; Vietnam, hitherto a chronic food-deficit country, became the third largest exporter of rice in the world; and other social and economic indicators also showed positive signs. However, these improvements have not come without cost.

This study, based on a case study in Trung Mon commune, Yen Son district, Tuyen Quang province in the North of Vietnam has demonstrated that although the agricultural changing policies have increased agricultural productivity and in general, improved the living standard of a great number of peasant households, rural women have not benefitted from these outcomes to the same extent as men. A powerful gender stratification system has reemerged in the countryside. It is reflected in the increase in the work load of women, the significant decline of the position of many women in the family and in the rural society. The problems experienced by women living without husbands were greater than in the collective system. It is also noted that these gender inequalities are traced, on the one hand to some inappropriate agricultural policies of the current agricultural household production system and on the other hand to the reemergence of the male-dominant attitude and culture.

December 2, 1994

Bui Thi Lan

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**GENDER DIFFERENTIATED IMPACTS OF CHANGING
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The assumption that agricultural development that benefits men will automatically benefit women has not always been true. This study has demonstrated that agricultural changing policies (1987-1993) in Vietnam have affected men and women quite differentially.

CHAPTER ONE

RURAL WOMEN IN THE THIRD WORLD

1. Rural women in the third world

Throughout the world, women have played a vital role in agricultural production. According to United Nations estimates, women in rural areas grow at least 50 percent of the world's food¹. In some parts of Africa, women provide up to 90 percent of the food supply². In Asia, women perform 60 to 80 per cent of the total agricultural labour¹.

All over the third world, women work in all aspects of agriculture including land preparing, planting, weeding, applying fertilizer and harvesting. In most cultures, rural women take charge of the processing and storage of agricultural products. Women are substantially involved in animal husbandry, especially small animal production for family consumption as well as for commercial purposes. Women are also responsible for dairy and meat production. They collect feed and fodder for animals, milk the cattle, process

¹UNDP. Women, Environment and Food. New York: UN, 1980.

² UNDP. Rural Women's Participation in Development. New York: 1980.

³. FAO. Women are Farmers too. Rome : FAO, News Release, 1988.

the milk, and market the dairy products locally. In Pakistan, for instance, 60 to 80 percent of women feed and milk cattle. In Chile, 80 percent of women take care of ruminant animals⁴. Women process food, especially for family consumption with few or no modern equipment. Women are also involved in cleaning, threshing and grinding grains or drying fish, making cheeses or yoghurt⁵.

As agricultural producers, women contribute to the gross national product, to the national welfare as well as generate income for the household. Women earn income through the sale of handicrafts and agricultural products and also through their wage labour.

As home manager, rural women normally have the bulk of responsibilities, managing and budgeting for household consumption, processing of food, searching for fuel and collecting of water or purchases of these basic needs in the market place. As mothers and wives, women are mainly responsible for children, husbands and other members of the family. Besides, women are very active in community activities⁶.

⁴ McSweeney. An Approach to collecting and Examining Data on Rural Women's Time Use and Some Tentative Findings: The Case of Upper Volta. Geneva: International labour Office, 1979.

Cloud K. Sexe Roles in Food Production and Distribution system in the Sahel. Rome: FAO, 1978.

FAO. Women in Agricultural Production. Rome: FAO, 1984.

What then do rural women in the third world gain from such a heavy burden?

The answer is :

"Rural women in developing countries are among the poorest and most vulnerable people in the world, and the incidence of their poverty is increasing. The total number of rural women living below the poverty line in developing countries was estimated in 1988 to be 564 million. This represented an increase of 47 percent above the numbers in 1965-1970, as compared with 30 percent for rural men below the poverty line, calculated on the basis of 41 countries with data which accounts for 84 percent of the total rural population of 114 developing countries covered in this study".⁷

On average, income paid to women in the agricultural sector is significantly lower than that of men even when men and women do the same farm work. The majority of women generally have more difficulty than men in gaining access to land, credit, technical services and commercial market outlets. They are sometimes viewed as providing only supplementary income to the family. It is unfortunate that while women produce much of the food in the developing world, they are more malnourished than men. In many poor countries,

⁷ International Fund for Agricultural Development.
The State of World Poverty, an Inquiry into its causes and consequences. London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1992.

even pregnant and lactating women suffer significantly higher rate of malnutrition⁸. In developing Countries, when food is scarce, usually just before the harvest, the work load of women increases without corresponding increases in food. Girls have significantly less access to food than boys. In one part of Bangladesh, almost three times as many girls as boys were found to be severely malnourished⁹. In addition, women constitute a very small proportion of holders of productive assets, especially land. In India, for instance, women's access to land is circumscribed by gender biases in laws (e.g on inheritance), and social customs¹⁰. In the case of Sri Lanka, under the Mahaweli Programme, land redistributed under reform and resettlement schemes was typically in men's names¹¹. Despite the significant role that women play in the economy and in the family for a long period in the history of humankind, "women were invisible, marginalized and devaluated, unrecognized, shrouded physically as well as quantitatively by under-reporting in statistics and GDP"¹².

⁸ Margaret A. "Women, the Vital Human Resource." Development, Journal of SID. Vol 7, 1988.

⁹ FAO. Women in Agriculture. Rome: FAO, 1988.

¹⁰ Agarwal B. Who seeks? who Reaps? Women and land Rights in India. New Delhi: New Delhi Publication, 1988.

¹¹ Asian and Pacific Development Centre. Women Farmers and Rural Change in Asia. Kuala Lumpur: APDC, 1987.

¹² Margaret A. Women, the Vital Human Resource. Development, Journal of SID. Vol 3, 1988.

Since the United Nations International conference in Mexico in 1975 and the subsequent declaration of the United Nations decade for women (1976-1985), women's issues in general and rural women in particular have received the attention of many governments as well as International Organizations. They have become visible in national and international development plans. From then on there has been a growing recognition of women's role in agriculture and their important contribution to global food production. There has also been increased attention to the integration of rural women in development. In this context, programmes, projects, and policies aimed at improving the low status of rural women and facilitating the development of rural women for example projects providing rural credit, technical training, agricultural extension and health services have been granted special attention of most governments of the developing countries namely ghana, Kenya, Brazil, Angola, Pakistan and Nepal, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Pakistan... As a result, some progress has been achieved over the past two decades, rural women have been integrated more in agricultural development projects. In many rural areas of developing countries, the provision of basic needs such as clean water, food, health care have been made available to women. In addition, through job and income-generation programmes and projects, women have more opportunities to get access to employment and gain higher-income.

However, in spite of the significant achievements which have been recorded so far by the international community and governments to promote the development of rural women in the third world, the plight of women have not changed much. They have still been subjected to many inequities in all spheres of life¹³. The situation of women at the end of the decade for women (1976-1985), from the point of view of development, is not all together encouraging. Women are still among those most seriously affected by a deterioration of living conditions experienced in many developing countries, and their access to income and property has declined. Furthermore, they are overburdened with work which is not recognized as work, and yet they constitute the lowest paid and unemployed population in developing countries¹⁴.

1.0 Agricultural reform and women in Asia

Many of the developing countries of Asia where agriculture is regarded as the mainstay of the economy are also characterized by low economic development. Poverty and frequent natural disasters have plagued countries such as the

¹³ ¹³ UN. Report of the World Conference on Women. New York: UN, 1985.

¹⁴ Based on an interview with the Deputy Director of the Branch for the Advancement of Women, Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, United Nations. "United Nations Decade for Women 1976-1985." Special Conference Issues. Bulletin 1. New York: UN, 1985.

Philippines, Bangladesh, India, Vietnam and China. Asia is also a region where the majority of rural women live at the margin of existence. However, it is necessary to recognize that rural women in these countries play a major role in the national economies especially in agricultural production. Constituting a large proportion of the rural workforce, women perform many important tasks in agriculture as well as related agricultural activities. They also make a significant contribution to their families' economic income through sideline-occupations¹⁵.

Over the last three decades, governments of developing countries of Asia have adopted and implemented several new policies in agriculture to raise food production, alleviate poverty and improve the life of farmers in general and rural women in particular. Several efforts made by the governments of countries like India, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, China, Bangladesh... have been concentrated on areas such as land reform, changes in agricultural management systems, strengthening of agricultural extension systems, the spread of rural credit programmes, development of sideline-occupations and rural industries and commercialization of agricultural

¹⁵ According to the researcher of this study, sideline-occupations include small domestic livestock such as chicken, pig raising, vegetable, fruit growing and handicraft making in a small family scale production.

products¹⁶. Such new efforts have increased agricultural productivity, helped attaining food self-sufficiency and elevate the living standard of peasants in rural areas of Asia especially rural women¹⁷.

However, agricultural changes affect women in a different way than men. Women's status in the household and community has changed for the worse. For instance, landless women tend to have fewer work opportunities while women in landed families have to do more intensive farm work. The assumption that agricultural development that benefits men will automatically benefit women has not always been true. It is now widely acknowledged that agricultural changes affect men and women quite differentially.

The report of a study on Land Redistribution and Resettlement Policies written by Napat Sirisambhand, a researcher at the women's Studies Programme at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, indicates that in rural Thailand, traditionally a woman receives a piece of land from her parents after her husband was married into her household. The land reform policy took away this historical right of women by granting the land ownership title to household heads who are

¹⁶ Asian and Pacific Development Centre. Women farmers and Rural Change in Asia. Kuala Lumpur: APDC, 1987.

¹⁷ Ibid.

usually male¹⁸. In Malaysia, one of the recent strategies of the government in developing agriculture and solving the problem of poverty in rural areas is to transfer modern technologies into agricultural and industrial crop production. This change has severely affected rural women especially poor women working in rubber plantations. In fact, this has displaced female labourers in estate farms. As a result, they have become unemployed or have been pushed into marginalized jobs where the level of income is low and the working conditions are discouraging. Consequently, they have faced more difficulties in earning a living than before the introduction of modern techniques in rubber cultivation¹⁹.

Similar problems have occurred in the case of Indonesian and Filipino women when agricultural mechanisation and the "green" revolution were introduced in agricultural sector of these countries, the use of machine threshers as early as 1960s in the Philippines and as late as 1970s in Indonesia displaced women who participated in traditional threshing activities. Consequent changes in farm practices and labour arrangements reduced the demand of women's labour. As a

¹⁸ Asian and Pacific Development Centre. Agricultural Change, Rural Women and Organizations: A policy Dialogue. Kuala Lumpur: 1987.

¹⁹ Husin A. "Agricultural Changes: Its impacts on Social Organizations and Women's Participation in West Malaysia." Agricultural Change, Rural Women in Asia: A Policy Dialogue. Kuala Lumpur: APDC, 1987.

result, they became less wanted in many farming activities which demand technical skills²⁰.

The "White Revolution" in India was also an example of the negative effect of agricultural reform on rural women. In the Gujarat State of India, women of the poor castes used to graze the buffalo, milk them, market the butter locally and retain the skimmed butter milk for their families' diet. The introduction of industrial dairies to improve the production and distribution of milk to urban areas has displaced women small size milk processing and marketing activities. The main point is that the small income in butter and in cash of the majority of women in Gujarat State of India from traditional milk processing have disappeared. Worse than that they have to use a part of their family's income to buy skimmed butter milk which was the nutritional benefits they used to get from their traditional milk processing job²¹.

Even in a socialist country like China where the government has consistently paid great attention to the emancipation and status enhancement of women, the effects of agricultural changes on rural women have also been adverse. Agricultural reform in China with the introduction of Production Responsibility System (PRS) was introduced in the rural areas of China in 1979. Since then, its implementation

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ **Marilee K. Women, Land and Food Production**. Rome: FAO, 1989.

has resulted in significant improvements in the rural economy and growth of production in the agricultural sector, for instance, the average annual growth rate of agricultural output was 6.2 percent during the 1978-1988 period. The per capita income of peasants has also increased at the rate of 14.8 percent a year in China. The progress which has been made in terms of diversifying agricultural crop production and expanding animal husbandry are clearly evident. Along with the growth of agricultural production, rural industries in China have rapidly increased. In 1991, for instance, there were about 18 million village enterprises located in the rural districts of China. The total output of rural industries reached US \$128 billion in 1990. Currently, it is estimated that 40 percent of consumer goods in China are produced in the rural industrial sector. In fact, the recent change from the agricultural collective system to the peasant household system is seen as an example of a stage where economic production is all important (and has been successfully increased), but women's issues are neglected. The valuation of males as superior to females is indicated in female infanticide and the lower worth of a woman. At the same time, women's household responsibilities are overloaded, leaving them with little time for participation in organizations or meetings. Worse than this, the new agricultural system in China (The Production Responsibility System) is characterised by several factors

which cause rapid rural stratification and maintain patriarchy and discrimination against women²².

In addition to the socio-cultural issues involved, the physiological conditions of women of child-bearing age and their post-natal requirements keep them away from continuous work participation and are detrimental to their health. While in normal circumstances, the better-placed urban women in developed societies can overcome these impediments through better access to economic and social welfare services, the poor women in developing countries in Asia are in jeopardy. They lack nutritional supplies and do not even have access to welfare facilities such as clinics and medicine during delivery. As a result, the majority of children are delivered by traditional birth attendants.

There are many factors inhibiting Asian women from enjoying the full benefits of agricultural changes. Traditionally, they are in a subordinate position in relation to men; their access to productive assets such as land and credit are limited; their mobility in many cases is restricted by traditional norms. In addition, they are frequently at lower educational and technical levels than their male counterparts. Furthermore, the social structure in which rural women of developing countries in Asia live today has evolved from and is reinforced by religious faiths and belief

²² Govind, K. "Women and Rural Development Programmes and Organizations in Contemporary China and India." Women Farmers and Rural Changes in Asia, Kuala Lumpur: APDC, 1987.

that render many women incapable of independent action and decision-making. In this context, women often voluntarily surrender their initiatives to their male counterparts, be it their husbands, fathers, brothers or sons. This has resulted in women being accorded less attention regarding their subordinate position, thus surrendering the gains from various agricultural and rural development programmes. This situation gradually perpetuates the dependency of women on men and keeps women in a socio-economic status lower than that of their male counterparts.

Commenting on the effects of agricultural changes on rural women, the International Seminar on "Agricultural Change and Rural Women" which was held in Beijing, China on 29th October-8 November 1986 concluded that "the more rural women participate in development, the greater the burden placed on them. It is the double burden of productive and reproductive functions that women have to bear"²³.

Like many other countries in Asia, over the last two decades, the government of Vietnam has tried very hard to improve living and working standards of the Vietnamese. For several years since the reunification of the country in 1975, the Vietnamese government has carried out a number of new socio-economic policies for the country's economic development. Among these policies, the agricultural reform from 1987-1993 is the most radical. The result of this reform has indicated

²³ CIRDAP. Cirdap Studies Series, Dhaka: CIRDAP, 1990.

that collective land ownership was eliminated, changes in the managerial mechanism of agricultural production occurred and a new agricultural production system based on the individual peasant household was introduced. These changes have helped to improve the overall agricultural sector. Vietnam, hitherto a chronic food deficit country, has become the third largest exporter of rice in the world and social indicators regarding malnutrition, infant mortality and life expectancy shown signs of improvement.

These improvements, however, have not come without costs. For one thing, the benefits of economic growth and development have not been equitably distributed. There is evidence that the gap between the rich and poor has widened. This problem is directly related to the inaccessibility to labour, capital, technology, marital status and land in most cases. Since the distribution of these factors are based on family size, the degree to which rural women benefit from the new agricultural production mechanism depends greatly on their families' labour power, their own management capability and technical knowledge. Those who have little labour power, no capital, technical or management skills encounter several difficulties in making a living both for themselves and for their families. Many such families can not produce enough food for their daily needs. They are, therefore, worse-off under the new policies.

It will be enlightening, therefore, to examine the major impact and extent of these new policies especially the effect

of the agricultural reforms (1987-1993) on rural women in the North of Vietnam in order to determine whether they have indeed improved the conditions of rural women in Vietnam.

1.1 Objective of the study

In this study, the changing role and status of rural women in the North of Vietnam as a result of the agricultural reform process will be investigated, specific concerns will focus on the "reproductive" and "productive" role of women, the sexual division of labour and other related factors such as income and power of men and women. It also intends to look at the changing life of women living without husbands under the agricultural reform in order to determine whether they are better-off today than in the past. Although the new agricultural policies have made possible increases in agricultural productivity and turned Vietnam into a food surplus country within a period of about five years, rural women have had to deal with enormous problems. While recognizing the positive impacts of the agricultural reforms on the lives of peasant households, the focus will be on the differential impact of these new policies in the agricultural sector (1987-1993) on the lives of rural women in North Vietnam. The bottom-line of these searchings is to determine how the agricultural reforms in Vietnam (1987-1993) have affected rural women in different ways than men.

Once the causes of these new problems have been identified, recommendations will be made to find lasting solutions. This will help government policy makers and development practitioners not only in Vietnam but also in other developing countries in Asia to address similar problems which may arise as a result of future policies. Countries such as China, Laos, Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines have also recently promulgated several reform policies resulting in similar problems for rural women.

Based on the literature available, this study will address the questions (i) Have women improved economically since the introduction of the household economy? (ii) Has women's position in the family and in the society been enhanced? (iii) Has women's workload increased? (iv) How have the agricultural new policies affected women living without husbands? and the most important question is to what extent the agricultural changing policies (1987-1993) has affected differentially men and women in the North of Vietnam?.

1.2 Methodology

Since the introduction of the economic reform policies particularly agricultural reform policies occurred in Vietnam in 1987, the literature has become abundant on the subject. This study has made full use of quantitative and qualitative data and information from secondary material concerning the

issues which have been raised. Special reference is made to previous studies on the effects of agricultural reform in China (1979-1993) because China and Vietnam are two socialist countries in Asia which have undergone almost the same agricultural collective production mechanism over the last decades. In 1979, China went ahead in the transformation from a collective to a household production system the "Production Responsibility System". Ten years later, Vietnam also committed itself to a similar transformation in the agricultural sector. It is clear that there have existed several differences between China and Vietnam in terms of the way the two countries have reformed their agriculture. The impacts of these reforms on rural women in the two countries have also been different. However, it can be seen that there are similar opportunities as well as problems brought about by these reforms to the lives of women in the two countries. It is, therefore, very important to look at the impact of agricultural reforms (1979-1993) on rural women in China in order to have a better understanding about the diversified impacts of the transformation of agriculture in a socialist country as it moves from centrally planned into a market-oriented economy.

Attention was also paid to the literature on rural women in developing countries available from various sources namely the World Bank (WB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), The United Nation

Organization of Food and Agriculture (FAO), The International Labour Organization (ILO), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and The International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), to mention a few.

In order to heighten an understanding of the problems of rural women as a result of this agricultural reform in Vietnam, primary data and information was collected from 22 two-hour open-ended individual interviews with people from various research and policy making institutions in Vietnam at central and provincial level. In addition, a case study was conducted in Yen Son district, Tuyen Quang province in the North of Vietnam to determine the problems at the grassroots level. The case study was selected at a locality where farmers had gone through major changes of agricultural reforms since 1954, agricultural collectivization (1954-1987) and agricultural household economy (1987-1993).

Interviews were designed to acquire information about the status of rural women before and after the agricultural reforms on several aspects namely family structure, the productive and reproductive role of rural women, the sexual division of labour, marital status, income, education and social welfare policies of the government, power in the peasant family and in the society and other related issues.

The research in the field was divided into three steps. In the first step, the researcher conducted individual interviews with key-informants from various management and

research institutions at national level namely agricultural management policy of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food industry, agricultural economic research Institute, the Vietnam Women Union and the Centre for Women Studies. These interviews were very important and necessary in getting information about the agricultural itself and understanding the point of views of different policy makers, social and economic researchers at macro level regarding the impacts of the new agricultural policies on Vietnamese farmers in general and in particular on rural women in the North of Vietnam. These interviews were especially efficient that they provided a wide range of views on the same subject. This step was taken as an exploration of on-the ground research in Vietnam.

In the second step, individual interviews at the provincial level with key-informants of the people's committee and the Women Union of Tuyen Quang province had a twofold objective: Attaining an overview of the economic and social situation of the province before and after the agricultural reforms and understanding their opinion on the major positive and negative effects of the new agricultural policies on farmers especially on rural women. These interviews not only provided a source of comparative information regarding the economic and social indicators of the selected province before and after the agricultural reforms but also helped to choose an appropriate commune for the case study.

The third step was directed to rural men and women in one commune in Tuyen Quang province. A variety of qualitative methods such as individual open-ended interview, focused-group interview, group observation were used to understand the feeling and perception of interviewees (men and women) about their lives, their roles and positions before and after the agricultural reforms. Twelve households in one commune of Yen Son district selected for individual interviews at the local level were divided into three groups based on variables of age, income and marital status as follows:

Group I includes 4 better-off households of which:

- 1 household is headed by an old couple
- 1 household is headed by a middle age couple
- 1 household is headed by a young couple and
- 1 household is headed by an old single woman

Group II includes 4 middle-income households of which:

- 1 household is headed by an old couple
- 1 household is headed by a middle age couple
- 1 household is headed by a young couple and
- 1 household is headed by a middle-age single woman

Group III includes 4 low-income households of which:

- 1 household is headed by an old couple
- 1 household is headed by a middle-age couple
- 1 household is headed by a young couple and
- 1 household is headed by a young single woman

In this step, a partial framework of feminist participatory method of research based on men and women's everyday activities was adopted. The development of a trusting and personal relationship, a mutual exchange of information and a sharing of experiences and ideas between the interviewer and interviewees and mostly learning and listening to the people is called for. A method of probing and pacing questions was largely used in different conversations with male and female farmers. Open-ended individual interviews were appropriate for this study since it helped to explore people's views of reality and also allowed interviewees to respond in an insightful and thoughtful way.

This study is important because, although some researchers have written on the changing plight of rural women in Vietnam, including studies on the impact of the new socio-economic policies on the life of rural women as well as on the development of the household economy in Vietnam, none have analyzed the problems from the perspective which is being considered in this study. After working in the field with rural women particularly in the agricultural sector in Vietnam for more than 12 years, I hope to provide through this study a unique perspective of analyzing the issues mentioned earlier.

1.3 Limitations of the study

Like any other study, this research work is not without limitations. First, it is limited to examining the impacts of the agricultural reforms on rural women in the North of Vietnam. Second, due to time and financial limitations, the case study was only undertaken in some rural areas in the upland of the Northern part of Vietnam. Other parts of the North Vietnam such as the Red River Delta and the middle land areas, which are considered the largest food producer in the North of Vietnam would have been also worth while studying. Third, the time that can be spent in the field was shorter than desired and the number of interviewed people at the grassroots level was small, also given these constraints the use of a full participatory methodology was not possible.

Despite these limitations, the study was worth pursuing and the findings of this study will be helpful to those who are responsible for designing development policies for rural women in Vietnam and in other developing countries.

1.4 Thesis structure

The thesis is structured around six chapters. Following chapter one, the introduction, Chapter two discusses theories of development and feminist frameworks. In this chapter, the concepts of development and gender issues are shown to be very important and closely connected. This chapter identifies the two major development perspectives - Modernization and Marxist

theories. Also, three feminist development approaches are discussed: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD).

Chapter three provides a historical background to the status of rural women in Vietnam before the agricultural reforms took place in 1987. Special reference is given to the situation of rural women in Vietnam through the feudal and French periods. This chapter will also discuss the changes for rural women brought about by the 1945 Revolution. Then the status of rural women in the South under American regime is described. Finally, the change to collectivization in the North is discussed and the impacts of this reform on Northern rural women is examined as well.

Chapter four examines the (1987-1993) agricultural reform policies that changed agricultural collectivization into an agriculture based on the household economy. The main focus is on the nature of agriculture itself and the changing role and position of rural women in the North of Vietnam after the agricultural reform policies were promulgated.

Chapter five focused on the discussion of the findings of the field research in Vietnam. The first section provides an overview of the socio-economic situation of the selected community in Tuyen Quang province since the introduction of the new agricultural policies. Based on the illustration provided in the case study, the second section discusses major impacts of agricultural reforms in Vietnam between the period

1987 and 1993 on rural women in the North of Vietnam. The last section examines the extent to which the agricultural reform has differentially affected men and women.

Chapter six draws some conclusions as to the results of the study. Based on the findings, a number of practical recommendations are proposed to help the government of Vietnam design further development policies in the agricultural sector in Vietnam. They are expected to make a modest contribution to the development of the women in Vietnam who are the subjects of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In analyzing the impacts of Agricultural reforms (1987-1993) on rural women in Vietnam, some understanding of the nature and content of major existing developmental and feminist perspectives is needed. This is important because it provides the necessary framework to examine the changing lives of rural women in Vietnam after the agricultural reform. At the same time, it indicates what perspective is used in looking at the question of rural women during the economic reform process.

2. Marxist theories of development and women

Orthodox Marxist theorists including Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, and Vladimir Lenin argued that a capitalist society is divided into two classes: the exploiting and the exploited. The exploiting class is the bourgeoisie that owns the means of economic production and the exploited is the proletariat who does not own any means of economic production. The capitalist system is dependent upon the extraction of profit by the owner from the labour of the proletarian class through surplus value. To do that the bourgeoisie must legitimate their claim to the surplus value either by social norms or by

force. When the exploited class is aware of its condition, the conflicts between the exploiting and the exploited classes will emerge thus leading to radical social revolution which will bring about social change. As a result, a new society of proletarians takes shape. The latter will eradicate the capitalist structure and set up a socialist society. Followers of Marx also viewed socialism as an intermediate stage between capitalism and communism and the aim of socialists as the strengthening or mobilization of the masses in their struggle to overthrow the capitalist system of production and exploitation. This can be done through mass literacy and ideological consciousness-raising through which the proletariat is made aware of its exploited situation²⁴.

There is no evidence showing that early Marxist theory is based on industrialization as a development strategy. While applying Marxism to the policy of reconstruction of the Soviet Union after the First World War, Lenin initiated a policy of industrialization in which the main component was electrification. In so doing, Lenin emphasized the importance of centralization of control in the state, nationalization of the means of production and democratic participation in economic planning.

Although Marx himself did not say much about women, Engels and Lenin both expressed their concern about the

²⁴ Melotti, U. Marx and the Third World. London: the Macmillan Press, 1977.

subordinate position of women in capital society and suggested solutions to free women from the oppression. They believe that capitalism would bring women and children into the wage labour force along with men. By so doing, capitalism would abolish the sexual division of labour as well as sex differences in that all workers would be equally exploited. Engels thought that the reason that women would be exploited by men was that they lacked economic independence. He also believed that women's oppression like class oppression would change if the relations of productions changed. To end this exploitation, women should be largely mobilized into the work force and freed from unpaid domestic work which would be taken over by the state. He said "it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished"²⁵.

There have been several critiques of Marxist theories in relation to women. One important critique is the point of view of Marxist theories of the reproductive role of women in the household. It has been argued by a number of feminists that to abolish gender inequality, it is not enough to mobilize women in the public sphere of socially productive work and getting access to education, but women should also be

²⁵ Engels, F. The origin of the family, Private Property and the State. New York, 1975.

equal with men in terms of domestic work. Some socialist feminists state that one of the causes of gender inequality is the sexual division of labour, wherein women are responsible for most of the domestic work of maintaining and reproducing the family and in a subordinate position to men²⁶. One important debate within this line of thinking was that Marxist theories have tended to pay great attention on "productive" responsibility and neglect "reproductive" roles of women: "Marxist theory appears to have little room for questions that deal directly with women's reproductive and sexual concerns (contraception sterilization, and abortion; pornography, prostitution, sexual harassment, rape, and women battering), and as a result, Marxist Feminists have tended to focus only on women's work-related concerns"²⁷.

Along with the above discussion, it has been observed that the massive entry of women into the wage labour force with men has occurred in many socialist countries, namely the former Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, China, Cuba and Vietnam. However, It is clear that these countries have failed to assure the freedom of women from male supremacy. Domestic work was not socialized and women have still been allocated an enormous burden of domestic work in addition to productive labour such as cooking for family' members, managing the house

²⁶ Tong, R. Feminist thought: A comparative Introduction. London: Westview Press, 1989.

²⁷ Ibid.

and having responsibility of domestic livestock. All this work is unpaid. Some domestic work has been taken care of by public services like child care. However, domestic labour remains a heavy burden for women on top of production work. It has been seen that even when reproductive and domestic work has been brought into the public sphere such as in China, Vietnam, Cuba it still remains underpaid, undervalued "women's work"²⁸.

2.0 Modernization theory and women

Emerging in the 1950's, "Modernization" theory was defined as a dominant theory of development for third world countries. This dominant view, "Modernization", implies a high degree of structural differentiation and social, economic and political mobilization facilitating the emergence of centralized institutions²⁹. In its nature, modernization is a development theory based on the pursuit of the westernization of the economic, political and social institutions. It is, in fact, the process of change towards the models of social, economic and political systems which

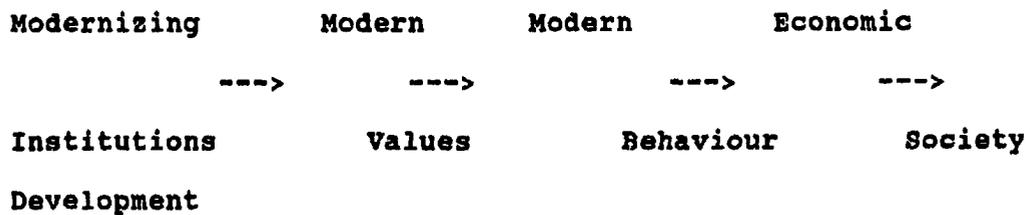
²⁸ Eisenstein, Z. "Reform or Revolution: Towards a Unified Women's movement." Women and Revolution. London: South End Press, 1981.

²⁹ Eisenstadt, S. Tradition, Change and Modernity. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973.

have developed in Western Europe and North America from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries³⁰.

Modernization theory is based on the notion that there is a direct causal relationship between five sets of variable, namely, modernizing institutions, modern values, modern behaviour, modern society and economic development. These links are illustrated as follow.

FIGURE 1



**Source: the process of modernization
(based on Inkeles and Smith, 1974.)**

The main argument of Modernization theory formulated by modernists like Talcott Parsons, Durkheim and Weber is that economic growth based on rapid industrialization via entrepreneurship, sustains the process of capital savings and investment. They believed that the poverty of developing

³⁰ Kate, Y. Introduction to the Sociology of Development. New York: 1983.

countries is a lack of modernity in all its aspects³¹. Therefore, according to many Modernization theorists, to develop an economy in the third world, modern techniques were considered an important tool of development and the level of achievement in a society is expressed in terms of the level of innovation and entrepreneurship. A massive expansion of education systems would provide a great number of well technically well-trained workers and managers who would be able to master modern technologies and use sophisticated equipment to produce a surplus of products for society. In this context, poor agrarian societies in developing countries would be transformed into industrialized modern ones. As the economy grows, the benefits of modernization such as better living conditions, high wages, good education and adequate health services would "trickle down" to all segments of society.

In these circumstances, women, especially rural women, were thought to benefit automatically from an overall economic growth of the modernization process. As Rathgeber has put it "Women rarely, if ever, were considered as a separate unit of analysis in this modernization literature, it was assumed that

³¹ Stamp, P. Technology, Gender and Power in Africa.
Ottawa: International Development Research Council, 1989.

male experience was generalizable to females and all would benefit equally as societies modernized³².

It is, however, unfortunate that during the 1950s and 1960s the modernization approach failed to develop economy and improve the living standards of people in many developing countries where advanced agricultural technology, industrialization and urbanization were introduced. Instead of attaining rapid economic growth and increasing social equity, these societies were exposed to increasing poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, landlessness, homelessness, a high population explosion and high rate of illiteracy. For women in the third world, many studies showed that through the modernization process over these two decades. Women lives improved very little. There was even evidence to indicate that the position of women in many countries had declined³³. With the publication of Women's Role in Economic Development, Ester Boserup became the first feminist who criticized the effects of modernization on women. In this book, Boserup argued that in agriculture the benefits of new technologies usually were directed at men rather than women. New farming machines like tractor or harvesting machineries frequently demand strong labour like men's and, moreover, due to the

³² Rathgeber, M. WID, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1989.

³³ Ibid.

traditional culture of many developing countries, women are not allowed to learn new technologies. This often takes away women's access to mechanical jobs. As a result, women have had to stick to manual work and get low pay. Looking at the effects of modernization in agriculture on rural women in Africa, Boserup indicated that it is usually the men who learn to operate the new types of equipment while women continue to work with the old hand tools. As a result, the productivity gap (between men and women) tends to widen³⁴.

From the above analysis, it can be said that neither the framework of "modernization" nor those derived from a Marxist perspective provided the tools needed to analyze the social and economic reality of women's lives in the third world. Neither perspectives were able to provide a reasonable way of looking at women's marginalization from the development process and find lasting solutions for women's real emancipation³⁵. This was the basis for the development of three new feminist development frameworks: Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD) and Gender and Development (GAD).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ **Cebotarev, E. "Women and Agricultural Production."**
Resource for Feminist Research. Vol 11. Ontario: March 1992.

2.1 Women in development (WID)

The Women in Development (WID) approach was developed in the early 1970s. The term "Women in Development" was initiated by the Women's Committee of Washington, D.C in an attempt to bring the idea generated by Boserup to the attention of American policy makers³⁶. WID is a feminist perspective focusing on the inequality which women have experienced in society. Its main concern is to integrate women into economic activities especially development programmes, projects on equal footing with men in order to minimize the disadvantages of women in the productive sector and end discrimination against them³⁷. Under the WID approach, women should be integrated into the development process not only in the interest of equity but also in the interest of national economic growth and their own economic independence.

Like the dominant modernization framework in the 1950s, WID strongly focused on the transfer of new technology, the provision of extension services and credit facilities or so-called appropriate technologies to lighten women's work

³⁶ Maguire, P. Women in Development, An Alternative Analysis. U.S.A: Centre for International Education, University of Massachusetts, 1984.

³⁷ Jacquette J. Women and Modernization Theory: A decade of Feminist Criticism. In World Politics, No 2.

load³⁸. This thinking was proved to be unsuccessful in many developing countries, especially those of Asia as discussed earlier in the introductory part of this paper. Again, the question addressed by many feminists was: new or appropriate technologies for whom?³⁹

While focusing on the concept of equality between men and women by integrating women into development activities, the WID approach recognized and promoted the productive roles of women in development. It assumed that women are critical to economic production, but their access to resources and technologies is often constrained by gender barriers. This leads to the fact that women were deprived of to development benefits during the modernization period. To correct it, WID focused exclusively on the productive aspects of women's work. Therefore, the WID approach had a tendency to pursue the concept that women's lives would be better if women could participate fully into economic activities. From this stand, WID's greatest concern was to create more economic income for women through income-generating projects. For example, in agriculture a great number of projects were found to be actively to seek ways to include women in the process of agricultural development. Incorporation of women as development activates in agriculture is becoming a necessity.

³⁸ Stamp, P. Gender, Technology and Power. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1989.

³⁹ Margaret, A. Women, the Vital Humane Resource. New Delhi: New Delhi Publication, 1988.

Women, on the one hand, can learn agricultural techniques and on the other hand, can gain economic income from development projects.

Using a WID perspective, The WID office of UNDP (the United Nations Development Programme) and FAO (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) designed and implemented many projects known as women-specific projects to a strategy of including women components as add-ons to larger projects undertaken by these international institutions. In the attempt to help rural women earn more benefits from these projects, FAO and UNDP's areas of concentration include increased employment in the private sector, management, education and skill training, credit and technical assistance, and technology transfer⁴⁰.

However, It has been observed that when women's income-generating projects prove to be unsuccessful and become a significant sources of revenue, they often are taken away by men⁴¹. This is usually the case in developing countries because according to many cultures, women are not allowed to hold the purse of the family even they earn much money. As a result, women could not get access to the source of income generated by themselves through development projects.

⁴⁰ World Bank, Office of Women in Development. Women in Development: the First Decade (1976-1985). Washington D.C: WB, 1985.

⁴¹ Buvinic, M. "Projects for Women in The Third World: Explaining their Misbehaviour." World Development. New York: Vol 14, 1986.

Debating this impacts of income-generating projects for women, Maguire⁴² addressed the question: Income generation for whom?. According to some feminists, one of the cause leading to this problem is that WID overlooked the relation between women's oppression and class, race and culture⁴³.

In the 1970s, the WID approach was welcomed by the United Nations, especially the World Bank (WB), The International Monetary Fund (IMF), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) as well as many governments in the third world. A great number of projects and programmes aimed at generating more economic income for women was approved by international institutions such as WB, IMF, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), The United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP), The Food And Agricultural Organization (FAO) and governments in many developing countries such as Tanzania, Congo, India, Philippines, Indonesia, China, Vietnam. In addition, many international organizations like the WB, UNDP, FAO established a WID division to take care of "Women in Development" issue⁴⁴. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) adopted a WID policy in 1984 and gave strong support to development

⁴² Maguire, P. Women in Development, An alternative Analysis. U.S.A: Centre for International Education, University of Massachusetts, 1984.

⁴³ Mbilinyi, M. "Women in Development ideology: the Promotion of Competition and Exploitation." The African Review. Vol 1, 1984.

⁴⁴ UN. Report of the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: equality, Development and Peace. New York: 1980.

projects for women. This can be clearly seen in its policy statement: " CIDA supports projects developed by and for women ... especially at the grassroots level. The aim is to empower women to build better lives, to take part in and to benefit more fully from the wider development process"⁴⁵.

In developing countries of Asia such as India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Thailand, despite their resource constraints, initiatives have been taken for integration of women into development, including the establishment of national machineries and legislative enactments to minimize prejudices against women. Efforts have also made in providing women with financial supports in order to help them to improve their economic lives through special programmes for women⁴⁶.

In spite of remarkable achievements in expanding the concept of including women in work, enhancing women's roles in economic activities and producing excellent data on Women's activities in the third world, the WID perspective failed to include women in the mainstream of development. The evidence was that women could not benefit from development policies due to major barriers - male discrimination against women development, male domination of the cultural, political and

⁴⁵ **Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).** Sharing Our Future. Quebec: CIDA, 1987.

⁴⁶ **UN. Report of the world Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace.** New York: 1980.

economic values in society⁴⁷. In addition, WID Offices in many International Organisations such as UNDP, FAO were poorly funded so that women's projects could not be fully implemented⁴⁸. Besides, according to some other feminists like Mbiliny and Rathgeber, one of the reasons which caused the failure of WID was that like modernization approach, it accepted the existing social structure and never questioned the source and nature of women's subordination and oppression. As a result, it did not improve the social relationship between men and women⁴⁹.

2.2 Women and development (WAD)

The Women and Development approach (WAD), usually considered as having a Marxist feminist perspective, emerged in the second half of the 1970s as a response to the limitations of the WID approach in the analysis of the question of women during the economic development process. Unlike WID, WAD's major concern focuses on the relationship between women and development rather than purely on the

⁴⁷ **Jacquette, J.** "Women and Modernization Theory: A decade of Feminist Criticism" World Politic. Vol 2, 1982.

⁴⁸ **Staudt, K.** Women, International Development, and Politics, The Bureaucratic of Mire. London: Temple University Press, 1990.

⁴⁹ **Rathgeber, M.** WID, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre in Ottawa, 1989.

integration of women into development. It recognizes that women play very important "productive" roles in the society as well as "reproductive" roles in the family. Like WID, the WAD approach promotes income-generating projects in an effort to improve women's lives. WAD recognizes the problem of class, but pays very little attention to the question of gender subordination within class. Like WID, WAD fails to understand and analyze the influence of race or culture on women's subordination. Consequently, in designing and implementing practical projects, WAD does not offer a comprehensive way of looking at the relationships among patriarchy, the sexual division of labour, and the subordinate position of women. It simply assumes that the position of women would be improved when international structures become equitable⁵⁰. Finally, WAD had the tendency to concentrate on men's and women's separate relationship to the means of production, By so doing, WAD ignores the need to acknowledge and transform the power relationship between men and women⁵¹.

In looking at the position of rural women in relation to the WAD approach, WAD offers a more critical view to analyze rural women's subordinate position than WID since the former emphasizes the relationship of women and development

⁵⁰ Rathgeber, M. WAD, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre in Ottawa, 1989.

⁵¹ Jagger, A. "Political Philosophy of Women's liberation." Feminism and Philosophy. New York: Adams and Company, 1977.

processes. In the light of WAD, the cause of women oppression in rural areas such as patriarchy, class, race and culture was recognized. The reproductive roles of women in the family were also emphasized. However, like WID, the WAD approach does not count the reproductive side of women's work especially the time and energy women have to spend on domestic housework. In addition, due to the limitation of examining the gender issue within classes, WAD can not help rural women in the lower strata of rural society in the developing countries where poor women are often treated differently by their male counterpart than women in the upper class. For example, in many rural villages in India, women are classified into six castes. The results of some studies indicated that the women in lower casts are treated worse by their husband than the women in upper class. In terms of education, the former are found to be less educated than the latter. Consequently, the women from lower classes derive more disadvantages than benefits from rural development projects⁵².

2.3 Gender and development (GAD)

The Gender and Development approach (GAD) emerged in the middle of the 1980s as a response to the limitations of WID and WAD. It can be seen as an attempt to translate the theory

⁵² Gopala, S. Women in Participatory Development through Samajams, The Trivandrum Experience. Hyderabad: National Institute of Rural Development, 1990.

of socialist feminism into practice in the field of development. The stand of GAD is to integrate class and gender relations in a third world context and question why women are oppressed in the society as well as in the family. Like WAD, the GAD approach strongly recognizes the crucial contribution of women through their productive and reproductive roles. It considers the state institution as an important catalyzer to women development, but GAD goes further than WID and WAD in linking the domestic burden of women and the role of the state to the subordinate position of women⁵³.

The GAD approach sees women as agents of change rather than passive recipients of development assistance. It emphasizes the need for women to organize for a more effective political voice in changing their lives. It has also pointed out to the connection between women's oppression and the existing structure of class, race and culture. Beyond this exploration, GAD also pays attention to women's legal right such as land laws, and inheritance⁵⁴. Starting from a holistic perspective of social organization, GAD focuses intensively on the social relation between men and women in the family and in society. Moreover, GAD argues that the basis of women oppression is the social construction of sexual

⁵³ **Jaquette, J.** "Women and Modernization Theory: A decade of Feminism Criticism." World Politic. No 5, 1982.

⁵⁴ **Maguire, P.** Women in Development: an alternative Analysis, Center for Education. U.S.A: University of Massachusetts, 1984.

division of labour in terms of production and reproduction work. GAD proposes that women's lives can only improve if their domestic work load is shared with their male counterparts⁵⁵.

At the theoretical level, the GAD approach looks very comprehensive. Not only does it take into account the strategic policies for women development but also the practical needs of women in the development process. However, at the level of practical programming and project development, GAD seems not easily integrated into ongoing development policies and strategies⁵⁶. The problem is that the application of the GAD perspective in the field requires a commitment to a radical change in terms of socio-economic structure and power in the international and national machineries as well as in every family. This is a "really difficult" bargain between feminists and non-feminists. Not surprisingly, the result is always doubtful. For example, in China, it is hard to convince men to share domestic work with their female counterparts because many Chinese men and women think that women are born to be housewives. Even social scientists in China came up with a plan to marginalize women and their work. They stated:

⁵⁵ Rathgeber, M. WAD, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice. Ottawa: International Development Centre in Ottawa, 1989.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

"First, it is necessary to lengthen the time for maternity and child care leave. Raising good children is also a contribution to society. Second, we must begin with the actual state of social production in China and provide more time for women to engage in housework. For example, we could move up the retirement age for women in certain occupations to let younger workers participate in production. Work schedule could be changed to offer part-time employment, half day or three day work week. In addition, some trades could let women work in spurts as the job calls for, such as the morning or evening markets which could employ women for two to three hours a day. In this way, women not only participate in social labour and add a certain amount of money to the family income, but the tension on the home front in terms of housework and child care is also relieved. This system would enable women to combine their work capacity with their capacity as mothers, so they can do a better job of raising and educating the children"⁵⁷.

As in China, many policy makers, economic and social researchers, men and women in Vietnam still stick to the concept that women now have enough rights to survive. If the government gives women more rights, they will become "female lions" and take over men's position at home and in the society. From the literature on rural women in Vietnam, it has

⁵⁷ Beijing Publishing House. Social Science in China, No 2, Beijing: 1982.

been noted over the past three decades, the majority of feminist scholars in Vietnam, especially those working with orthodox Marxist theory, have tended to focus on the "productive" role of rural women rather than looking at their "reproductive" role. Many studies on rural women have concentrated on the jobs, generation of income and equal pay rather than questioning why women in rural areas of Vietnam have to do all unpaid domestic housework?⁵⁸

Even now, some feminists and Vietnamese women still believe that the lasting solution for the complete emancipation of women in Vietnam is only the active involvement of women in social production outside the house. In terms of the extra-domestic work burden, they think that it is a traditional style of Vietnam that women have to do all domestic chores in the house⁵⁹. Therefore, it can be seen that the specific impacts of the agricultural reforms on rural women have not been explored in depth in previous studies in Vietnam. Further more, many previous studies on rural women are characterized by misconceptions through separating the question of women subordination from the social intervention of men. As a result, the target groups for their studies are often women. By so doing, they automatically neglect the fact

⁵⁸ Centre for Women Studies. Vietnamese Women in the 1980s. Hanoi: Social Science Publishing House, 1989. and
Doan Trong. Report on Vietnamese Country Women. Their Situation and Aspiration. Ha Noi: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1982.

⁵⁹ Brasier, C. Vietnam, the Price of Peace. Quebec: 1992.

that the unequal socio-economic relation between men and women is the main cause for the subordinate position of women. For example, one of the basic factors causing the unequal share of benefits of agricultural development process between men and women is the division of labour between the sexes. This division of labour defines the responsibility of woman as reproductive labourer and home maker and burdens them with many unaccounted domestic work while men's responsibility is only limited to productive responsibility. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the impacts of agricultural reforms on rural women from the perspective of Gender and Development because the problems of women can not be understood properly except in relation to that of men. The negative and positive aspects of agricultural reforms on rural women will be only clearly identified if we look at them within the context of the sexual division of labour, the sexual division of income and benefits as the outcome of the agricultural changing policies. This is particularly important in the household economy system in which both the husband and wife are agricultural active labourers and women have to spend 16 to 18 hours to perform their productive and reproductive work while men only spend 12 hours⁶⁰.

From the above analysis, it appears that the GAD approach which identifies the unequal socio-economic relation between men and women as a cause of women oppression is an appropriate

⁶⁰ Ibid.

perspective for examining gender differentiated impacts of agricultural changing policies (1987-1993) in Vietnam.

CHAPTER THREE

RURAL WOMEN BEFORE THE AGRICULTURAL REFORM

3. The status of rural women under feudal regime

Before the Chinese invasion in 111 B.C, Vietnamese people lived in tribes and made their living mainly by growing wet rice, domesticating animals, hunting and fishing. As in many primitive tribes in other places in the world, the life in the early tribes in Vietnam was very simple. The tribals frequently shared their labour as well as agricultural product. After the first Chinese invasion, the peaceful life of the early Vietnamese tribes had completely changed. The communal society of Vietnam gradually transformed into a feudal one. As a result of almost one thousand years of Chinese domination, Vietnamese culture was greatly influenced by Chinese culture especially Chinese Confucianism. Since the nature of Confucianism is patriarchal, men were highly respected and women were despised. The relationship between men and women was that between a superior and an inferior. In the family, woman had to obey man even if the man was her son. When unmarried, a girl had to obey her father and her older brothers, after marriage, she had to obey her husband. Her duties are to take care of her parents-in-law, her children, the housework beside farming activities. When her husband was

dead, she had to obey her son who automatically replaced her husband as the head of the household⁶¹.

The overwhelming majority of women in the feudal society of Vietnam were rural women. For thousands of year in the history of Vietnam, rural women played a very important role in the agricultural economy, however, they suffered the most from the rigid confucian hierarchy. Women worked very hard to ensure the survival of their family but their economic contribution was ignored and they were always considered to be dependent to their male counterparts. Commenting on the plight of Vietnamese rural women under the feudal regime, White says that despite their crucial role in agricultural production, which extended to marketing activities outside the village, women were subordinated in both village and family. They were excluded from membership in the council of notables and from participation in village meetings, while within the household, few women had independent access to land. The land of a widow's husband was generally inherited by a son or a male relative⁶². The proverb "one hundred women was not worth than a man" repeated by many old Vietnamese women reflects the

⁶¹ National Centre for Social Studies of Vietnam, and Gothenburg University of Sweden. Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family. Ha Noi: Social Science Publishing House, 1991.

⁶² White, Ch. Socialist Transformation of Agriculture and Gender Relation: the Case of Vietnam. New York: Monthly Press Review, 1985.

discrimination of the feudal society towards rural Vietnamese women in the feudal society.

Belonging to men as their property, women had no rights in any sphere of life in society. According to the feudal law, a male landlord had right to buy concubines and use them as labourers or domestic servants for his family. Many young girls were often married to old men or small boys to settle debts of their families. As a result of that they spent their whole lives working for their "husbands" families. In fact, these landlords were their owners rather than their husbands. A woman, once bought by a landlord, was forced to accept unconditionally all his and his first wife's orders. She had to work very hard to pay the money that the landlord paid for her family. Consequently, she became a slave of the landlord's family⁶³.

According to Confucian ideology, only sons could perform the rites for ancestor-worship, perpetuate the family lines because when a girl got married, she had to move to her husband's house to take care of his family. In the old days, parents often thought that if they had a girl, they would lose her to another family. This was also the reason why in the feudal family, women had no value and no share in the heritage. Girl babies were frequently coldly welcomed by

⁶³ Centre for Women Studies. Vietnamese women in the 1980s. Ha Noi: Social Publishing House, 1989.

parents when they were born while boy babies were usually warmly welcomed by them⁶⁴.

Marriage was not the outcome of love between boys and girls. It was the choice made by parents. Frequently, a young girl had to accept the partner chosen by her parents no matter whether she loved him or not. In the older days, the phenomenon of matching male and female babies when they were born was popular in the countryside of Vietnam. A daughter in-law was usually ill-treated by her husband's family members. For instance, many women were even not allowed to have meals together with their husband's family but had to wait until all members of the family finished their meals. If there was some food left, she could have it in the corner of the kitchen. If there was nothing, she had to go to bed with an empty stomach. The majority of daughters in-law had no freedom at all but suffered a life full of concession⁶⁵.

According to feudal law, a woman was allowed to get married only once. When her husband died, normally she was requested by her husband's family to stay alone for the rest of her life in order to take care of her children and parents in-law. Remarriage for widows was discouraged. In case where a young widow wanted to remarry, she had no right to the

⁶⁴ Ngo Ba Thanh. Status of Women: Vietnam. Paris: UNESCO, 1989.

66. National Centre for Social Sciences of Vietnam, Gothenburg University of Sweden. Sociological Studies on the Vietnamese Family. Ha Noi: Social Science, 1990.

custody of her children and she did not have the right to the estate to which she had contributed during the time she worked in her husband's family. A man was not expected to be faithful to his wife but a woman was to be absolutely faithful to her husband. If a woman was discovered to be unfaithful to her husband, she had to face brutal punishment. In order to humiliate her, her parents in-law shaved her head and plastered it with lime and exposed her affair in public. In some areas, unfaithful women were even trampled by elephants⁶⁶.

The feudal law called "that xuat" stated that a man could repudiate his wife for the following reasons⁶⁷:

- 1 - Barrenness
- 2 - Wanton conduct
- 3 - Neglect of parents in-law
- 4 - Garrulousness
- 5 - Theft
- 6 - Jealousy and ill-will
- 7 - Incurable disease

In terms of education, it can be said that under feudal patriarchy, women had no right to get access to education. The reason given was that women are ignorant, filled with bad instincts and hard to educate. All privileges in education and social promotion were given to men while women were taught

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

to have responsibility to provide financial support to their husbands and to take care of their family when they went to school⁶⁸.

The position of Vietnamese rural women was very low compared to that of men. Yet in the early history of Vietnam, women played an important part in the foundation, construction and defence of the country. There is a saying that "when the enemy comes, even women should fight". It is a significant fact that women played an important role in the fighting against foreign aggressors throughout the history of Vietnam. During Chinese domination, despite women's inferior position, the first two insurrections of the Vietnamese people against Chinese aggression were carried out under the leadership of three women: the two Trung sisters and Ms Trieu Thi Trinh. Twice, they called on the people of Vietnam, men and women, to rise up to fight against Chinese invaders and to drive them out of the country.

The first insurrection was led by two sisters: Trung Trac and Trung Nhi who in 40 A.D, led an army of 80,000 with 38 female generals to a successful defeat of Chinese aggressors. They ruled the country for three years. In 245 A.D, a 21 years old peasant woman named Trieu Thi Trinh led a peasant rebellion to get rid of the Chinese invaders. She said to her older brother "I only want to ride the wind and walk the

⁶⁸ Ngo Ba Thanh. Status of Women: Vietnam. Paris: UNESCO, 1989.

waves, slay the big whale of Eastern sea, clean up the frontiers and save the people from drowning. Why should I imitate others, bow my head, stoop over and be a slave? Why resign myself to menial housework⁶⁹". Her above saying became very famous and it was passed from generation to generation of Vietnamese people.

3.0 The status of rural women under French domination (1858-1945)

In 1858, the French conquest of Indochina started. In 1862 and 1867, the Nguyen Dynasty signed Protectorate treaties with the French. From then on, Vietnam became a protectorate of France. The country was integrated into a geographic entity called "French Indochina", which also embraced Laos and Cambodia. In order to more easily control Vietnam, the French divided it into three parts: Tonkin in the North, Annam in the Centre and Cochinchina in the South.

French domination of over one century turned Vietnam from a feudal into a semi-feudal colonial society. The main purpose of the French occupation in Vietnam was to exploit the natural resources of Vietnam to take back to France as they did in other colonies in Africa. They extracted metal ores, coal, rubber and other mineral sources and shipped them to

⁶⁹ Marr, D. Trieu Thi Trinh, Peasant Woman Leader.
Canberra: National Australian University, 1981.

France. Under this policy, the life of the Vietnamese people, especially the peasants, was extremely difficult. In addition, the French colonists carried out a policy of impoverishment, thus making the life of Vietnamese people more miserable. As a result of this policy, in 1930 two thirds of the arable land in Vietnam was under the control of French colonialists⁷⁰. Consequently, the majority of Vietnamese peasants did not have land and had to work as labourers in either rubber plantations or in mines owned by French colonialists. The living and working conditions in these places were so bad that the Vietnamese farmers did not want to work there. It was reported that in order to force Vietnamese peasants to work in the mines, the French had to destroy dikes and flood entire villages in mine areas to make it impossible for the people to earn a living from farming, leaving Vietnamese peasants with no choice but to work in the mines. It was also reported that fifty thousands men and women died at work in French mines⁷¹.

In the 1940s, the French administration closely collaborated with the Japanese. They confiscated the majority of arable land in Vietnam and forced Vietnamese peasants to burn rice and grow export crops such as jute and cotton. This inhumane policy resulted in the most serious famine in the

⁷⁰ Bergman, A. Women of Vietnam. New York: People Press, 1975.

⁷¹ Ibid.

history of Vietnam. Two million Vietnamese people including many women and children, starved between the period between 1945 and 1946⁷². For the majority of Vietnamese rural women, life under French domination was a hell; having not enough land or no land, women had to either work in the French mines or sell their labour cheaply to the Vietnamese landlords. Many of them had to leave for the towns where they worked as home servants or even prostituted themselves for a poor living⁷³. It is said that women who worked in French rubber plantations suffered the most. By 1945, French owners in many rubber plantations in the South and the Centre of Vietnam designed a special torture which was applied for pregnant female workers called the "upside down pot" torture. The pregnant woman who tried to escape from the plantations was forced to dig a hole and lie face down with her stomach in the hole as the overseer beat her. As a result, eight out of ten pregnant women miscarried⁷⁴.

After more than one hundred years under so-called French civilization, 95 percent of Vietnamese people were illiterate. The number of women going to school were very few. Those that did were mostly from wealthy families in the city. It can be said that in those days nearly 100 percent of rural women were

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ **Centre for Women Studies. Vietnamese Women in the 1980s.** Ha Noi: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1989.

⁷⁴ **Ngô Ba Thanh. Status of Women: Vietnam.** Paris: UNESCO, 1989.

illiterate⁷⁵. The French on the one hand, imposed a colonial policy on Vietnam, on the other hand, promoted feudal ideology. As a result, as well as suffering from the common unfortunate fate of all colonized people, rural Vietnamese women were subjected to the patriarchal ideology of feudalism with its unaccountable injustices and miseries. This made Vietnamese women become slaves of slaves⁷⁶.

3.1 Rural women after the 1945 revolution

The August Revolution in 1945 was a great event leading to radical changes in the life of rural women in Vietnam. Right after Vietnam declared its independence in September 1945, the new government enacted several policies which completely changed the life of Vietnamese women. The 1946 Constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, for the first time, stated the principle of equality between the sexes and granted the voting right to women. Article 9 of the constitution (excerpts) states:

"All the power in the country belongs to the Vietnamese people, irrespective of race, sex, wealth, class, religion" and women are equal to men in all aspects"

Article 21 (excerpts) indicates:

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

"Women enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres, in political, economic, cultural, social and domestic life. For equal work, she is entitled to equal pay. The state guarantees to women workers and functionaries the right to be paid maternity leave before and after childbirth. The state protects the mother and children and ensures the development of maternity clinics, creches and kindergartens. The state protects marriage and the family"⁷⁷.

As a result, in early 1946, in the first election to the national Assembly of the new Democratic Republic of Vietnam, women, among them many rural women, made up 48 percent of the voters⁷⁸. There were 10 women representatives at the first National Assembly. From then on, Vietnamese rural women enjoyed many new rights in terms of social, political, economic and cultural conditions that they had ever experienced in their life before. Opportunities in education, health and employment were largely, for the first time open to women.

Since 1946, Vietnamese women have enjoyed massive legal reforms changing their lives economically, politically and socially. The land reform which was carried out in 1953 and completed in 1960 brought about significant changes for rural women. They were given the same amount of land as their male

⁷⁷ Susan, Allen. Women in Vietnam. Hanoi: May, 1993.

⁷⁸ Doan Trong. Vietnamese Country Women, their situation and Aspiration. Ha Noi: Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, 1981.

partners by the government. This further strengthened the rights of women in the new rural society. Remarkable results were recorded by the Vietnamese government in terms of education, for example, in the North, only four years after liberation in 1958, illiteracy was almost eliminated⁷⁹.

In 1959, the first and most important law on marriage was promulgated. It declares the equality between husband and wife in all aspects of family life; controlling the family, bringing up children, having equal rights to the ownership and use of property before and during the marriage and having rights to choose occupation and take part in social and political activities. It also states that daughters and sons should be treated equally by parents⁸⁰.

In 1980, the new Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam strengthens the right of women. Article 63 (excepts) declares:

"Men and women have equal rights in all respects: political, economic, cultural, social and in family life. The state and society are responsible for raising the political, cultural, scientific, technical and professional standards of women and constantly promoting their role in society"⁸¹.

⁷⁹ Ngo Ba Thanh. Status of Women: Vietnam. Paris: UNESCO, 1989.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

In 1984, the Council of Minister's Resolution No 176 (excerpts) states:

"Priority must be given to female recruitment in all occupations suitable for female labour. The enrolment of female students in educational and vocational establishments must be commensurate with the proportion of women in trades and services with a high female ratio. Complementary education courses must be opened for women so that they can meet the requirements for higher education enrolment..."⁸².

In 1986, the New law on Family and Marriage expended the Law on Family and Marriage promulgated in 1959 (excerpts):

Article 4: "It is prohibited to practise early marriage, forced marriage, to hinder marriage based on free consent and progress, to demand riches on the occasion of marriage and betrothal, to impose divorce..."

Article 15: "Each spouse have equal obligations and rights regarding common property. Purchases, sales, exchanges, donations, loans, borrowing and other transactions related to property of great value require an agreement between the spouses"

In response to the 6th National Congress of Vietnamese women convened in Ha Noi, the Council of Ministers promulgated regulation No 163 which ensures the participation of all levels of the Vietnam Women's Union in state management in order to improve the participation of women in elaborating

⁸² Ibid.

state plans, working out appropriate economic and social policies regarding women (excerpts):

Article 2: "All levels of Government, when studying, elaborating, amending or modifying policies and laws relating to women and children, such as policies on female labour, training and fostering women cadres, policies on child bearing and child birth, etc, shall send copies of the drafts to or hold direct discussions with the Women Union of the same level..."⁸³.

In summary, the role and position of women in Vietnam after the August Revolution changed dramatically. Women's role in the family and in the society were recognized by the new government. Women's rights in all spheres of life were protected. Therefore, women were happier and more active in economic production activities.

3.2 Vietnamese women during French war

From 1945 to 1954, the entire Vietnamese people carried out a resistance against French invasion for national independence. Million women from all places in the country participated actively in the resistance. They were united into the Vietnam Women's Union founded in 1930 which has 11

⁸³ Ibid.

million members nationwide⁸⁴. The Union has branches operating at three levels; provincial, district and commune. Its objectives during the war with France was to unite all Vietnamese women in the struggle and in the agricultural and industrial production. To some extent, the experience of French war positively effected Vietnamese women. When men were fighting in the front, women took the whole responsibility for economic and household activities. A great number of women also joined the army and became national heroines. After a nine-year war, the great unity and firm determination of the entire Vietnamese people led to a complete victory over the French in May, 1954. In fact, Vietnamese women contributed a great part in this glorious victory.

According to the Geneva Treaty signed between the government of Vietnam and the United Nations in 1954, Vietnam was considered as one sovereign, independent nation. The Geneva agreement arranged for the temporary partition of the country into two zones in order to facilitate the withdrawal of French troops and declared a free election of a new government for a reunified country in 1956. The united State was at that time a member of the United Nations replaced the French in the South. According to Geneva accords, the U.S presence in the South of Vietnam was to help with disarmament

⁸⁴ **Bergman, A. Women of Vietnam.** San Francisco: People Press, 1975.

of army troops of both sides and the arrangement of a free election. However, the U.S. did not follow the accords. In 1956, the U.S government began violate the Geneva agreement by sending troops to Vietnam and supporting the Diem puppet regime in the South to fight against the revolution government and prevent free election in the whole country. As a result, from 1954 to 1975, Vietnam was divided into two parts: the North and South. The North was completely independent but the South was under the American occupation. The victory over the Americans on April 30, 1975 ended the American- Vietnam war and finally, the country was completely reunified.

3.3 Southern women under American domination

In the period between 1954 and 1975, people in the South of Vietnam, especially women were faced with uncountable miseries under American occupation. By the end of 1966, about half million American soldiers were in the South of Vietnam. Massacre and rape were rampant. Chemical defoliants called "Agent Orange" and bombs destroyed and toxicated sixty percent of the arable land in South Vietnam. In the countryside, farmers were forced to move into concentration camps with no land to till, no schools and sanitary facilities. In the city, there were about four hundred thousand prostitutes, nearly one for every American soldier⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

Women in the South Vietnam endured painful separation and losses. Women whose husbands had regrouped in the North were forced by the puppet government to divorce their husbands and remarry with other men. Many women were arrested and tortured. It was reported that under American regime, there were a quarter of a million political prisoners, nearly half of them were women. Some were arrested because they rejected the sexual advances of the puppet government's soldiers, some were tortured because they participated in demonstrations against American occupation⁸⁶.

During the resistance against Americans in the South Vietnam, women played a very important role. In the areas occupied by Americans, women joined the People Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). Some of them were full-time fighters. Others were regional guerillas or local militia. In the areas liberated by the PLAF, women worked very hard to defense their village, taking care of children and producing food for soldiers in the front.

3.4 Agricultural collectivization in the North of Vietnam

From 1954 to 1965, people in the North of Vietnam enjoyed peace and joined agricultural cooperatives. When U.S air war against the North broke out in 1965, Northern people had to

⁸⁶ Ibid.

fight against American aircraft and produce food for the country's needs as well.

Agricultural collectivization was introduced in the North of Vietnam in early 1960 with the establishment of agricultural cooperatives and state farms and extended to the South after the reunification of the country in 1975. During the period between 1958 to 1980, thousands of agricultural cooperatives and collectives were set up throughout the country. Under this system, all the means of agricultural production and 95 percent of the agricultural land was collectivized. The rest of land (5 percent) was allocated to peasant households for their private production. Agricultural production activities were collectively organized on the basis of production teams, each team consisting of about ten to thirty households. Each household received remuneration from the cooperatives based on the recorded labour hours of its family members. Income from collective work, after paying an agricultural tax, was distributed to co-op members according to their work points given by the cooperative⁸⁷. In 1962, agricultural collectivization was completed in the North, 95

⁸⁷ "Work Point" system is a payment mechanism applied by the agricultural cooperatives under the agricultural collectivization. The number of points fixed by the cooperatives for a working day depends on the kind of farming work assigned to co-op members. For example, a man earned 12 work points per one day ploughing (8 hours), a woman earned 10 work points per one day transplanting (8 hours). By the end of every crop, the cooperatives distributed food and other farm products to every household on the basis of the number of work points recorded by each peasant household.

percent of farmers men and women joined cooperatives as co-op members⁸⁸.

Under the agricultural collective mechanism, production activities such as land preparation, seedling, transplanting, weeding and harvesting were managed by the cooperatives through the production teams. Every day, the team leader instructed team members to perform a certain amount of farming activities by contracting with them. After a working day, every person received some work points based on a "barem" fixed by the cooperatives. The number of work points given to a person depended on the type of work that person performed. By the end of every crop, the cooperatives would then distribute the final products to every household of the cooperatives according to the total number of work points they earned during the half year of working. In the period between 1960 and 1965, the government's policy was to strengthen the agricultural cooperative system through three main measures - first, improving collective management mechanism, second, introducing new technologies in agricultural production, third, building up a solid material foundation for agricultural sector.

In an attempt to implement these policies, the government spent a huge part of the state budget on training agricultural

⁸⁸ **Agricultural Management and Policy Department,
Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry. Study on the
Use and Agricultural Production Organization. Ha
Agricultural Publishing House. 1984.**

Land
Noi:

management staff, purchasing many new varieties of food and cash crops and importing new agricultural production and processing technologies. At the same time, it also invested in upgrading old irrigation schemes and building new ones. For instance, in 1961 alone, the investment in agricultural infrastructure went up 4.9 times as compared with the period between 1958 and 1960. In the same year, investment in agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, insecticides and seeds also increased 9 times in comparison with the previous year. As a result of this investment, agricultural production, per hectare of cultivable land, was increased by 43 percent⁸⁹. The total of agricultural production especially food production increased. Consequently, the income and living standard of the rural population improved considerably.

In the period between 1965 and 1974, the American air war with the North Vietnam was at its peak. Apart from undertaking resistance against the American aircraft and supporting the resistance of the Southern people for the reunification of the country, the government of Vietnam continued to strengthen the agricultural collective system in the North. An increasing portion of the government budget continued to be spent on technology and inputs in agricultural sector. In addition, agricultural inputs such as fertilizer, insecticide, gasoline and fuel, and the means of production such as tractors and farm machinery came free as part of aid

⁸⁹ Ibid.

from foreign countries. They were sold to cooperatives at extremely low prices, almost free of charge. However, due to the war and the weaknesses in the collective management system, Vietnam was not able to produce enough food for domestic consumption during this period. Most of the food was supplied from the socialist countries, especially the former Soviet Union and China.

In 1975, right after the reunification of the country, the government carried out agricultural collectivization in the South. It was to follow the same pattern as the model applied in the North in 1960. Within the period 1975-1977, more than 80 percent of the southern farmers joined agricultural collectives⁹⁰. After the South completed the agricultural collectivization, the government reorganized production and management of agricultural cooperatives in the whole country. Small cooperatives were merged into larger ones of commune size (owning up to 300 to 500 hectare of agricultural land). The result of this policy turned out to be critical. Due to the large scale of production and lack of production means, many cooperatives were not be able to attain their production plans and failed to encourage farmers to work for cooperatives. In addition, the source of agricultural inputs, which were supplied free of charge during the war, were gradually reduced and finally cut off. Cooperatives had a real difficult time and were not able to cope with the new

⁹⁰ Ibid.

challenges. The situation became worse in the early 1977. Agricultural production declined sharply. Farmers were not keen to work for the cooperatives but spent their time doing other jobs to increase their income. Thousand of hectares were left fallow even in the major rice producing areas such as the Red and Mekong river Deltas. The situation was so critical that many farmers decided to withdraw from the cooperatives, thus forcing cooperatives to find their exit.

In 1977, many cooperatives in the countryside of Vietnam began implementing new form of agricultural management system secretly. Each cooperative had its own methods but all aimed at a common goal - more jobs and more income to be provided directly to the producers. After having heard about this "phenomenon" and having examined the problem, the government enacted the directive No. 100 which officially recognized this contract system initiated by people and encouraged farmers to implement the new production contract system.

With the new policy, the cooperatives contracted with peasant household or individuals on the basis of the amounts of arable land they farmed. Farmers were eligible to negotiate with the cooperatives the amount of output they paid to the cooperatives as agricultural tax as well as the amount of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer and seed they received from cooperatives. After paying the fixed quota of agricultural output to the cooperatives, farmers retained the excess output for their use. Once, entering into contracts

with the cooperatives, farmers had responsibility for their own production. The cooperatives provided only some services such as land preparation or insecticide spray, other farming work was undertaken by farmers.

Since the introduction of the new contract system in 1981 in the whole country, agricultural production has been increased considerably for a rather long period before declining in the period between 1985 and 1987. The reasons for this decline were - first, the cooperatives retained the responsibility of distribution of inputs, services, collection of agricultural tax and fees. This made farmers extremely dependent on the cooperatives in terms of input supply and output distribution. Second, the shortage of major means of production such as drought cattle, farm machineries or processing equipment was critical. For instance, according to the land law, arable land was divided into many small plots for every peasant household in the cooperative, in these circumstances, large farm machineries such as tractors could not work on a small plot of land and became inappropriate. Third, over the years since its foundation especially during the wars, agricultural cooperatives were developed from agricultural production management units into social, economic entities. As a matter of fact, they were used to fulfil various non-economic activities and to pay a great number of staffs working for the locality such as school workers and commune health workers. These activities were financed

through cooperative farmers income⁹¹. Finally, the system itself was not able to make full use of farmers' production capability and potential agricultural resources due to the inflexibility of the collective managerial system. For example, farmers were not eligible to plan their production and had no autonomous right in production and business activities. All the above problems led to the collapse of the Vietnam's economy in 1987. The food production especially, rice production made a low and unstable development. Food production reduced from 18.20 million tons in 1985 to 17.56 million tons in 1987 while the population quickly increased with over 1 million new born per year, thus caused a serious shortage of food for domestic demand in Vietnam. The government had to import 800,000 tons of food for the country's need. Even though, a major part of population were under hunger and poverty.

Looking back over the period of more than 30 years of agricultural collectivization, it can be seen that some important achievements were recorded. For example, farmers gained benefits through collectivization especially in terms of social welfare such as education and health care services. However, the collective system itself was not efficient since it was not be able to satisfy the basic needs of farmers like

⁹¹ **United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) and The State Planning Committee of Vietnam. Report on the Economy of Vietnam. Ha Noi: UNDP Office, 1990.**

food, housing. This resulted in the need to devising new policies for a more economically efficient agriculture.

3.5 Impacts of agricultural collectivization on rural women

Women made a significant contribution to the movement of agricultural collectivisation and the building of a new countryside during and after the war with Americans. In agricultural sector, they made up 65 percent of the agricultural labour force. In crop production and livestock, 80 percent of the total labour was women⁹². According to the results of a survey conducted in 1984 by Le Ngoc Van (Institute of Sociology in Ha Noi) at Hai Thanh Commune, Ha Nam Ninh province, the main responsibility of agricultural production activities in the cooperatives were done by women. The sexual division of labour in some major farming activities was divided as follows⁹³:

⁹² **Ngo Ba Thanh.** Status of Women: Vietnam. Paris: UNESCO, 1989.

⁹³ **Centre for Women Studies.** Vietnamese Women in the 1980s. Ha Noi: Foreign Publishing House, 1989.

TABLE 1

Major farming works	Done mainly by husband	Done mainly by wife	Done by both
Land preparation	47.0	36.6	16.0
Seedling	24.1	54.1	21.5
Irrigation	27.6	45.3	27.1
Manure application	35.0	44.9	20.0

It has been argued that "with the formation of agricultural cooperatives, women's productive work previously thought of as supplementary or secondary was measured like that of men in work points"⁹⁴. The agricultural collective system paid attention to attain the equality between male and female co-op members in almost all aspects of its activities such as collective production work, income and social welfare distribution as well as cooperative management. First and foremost, like men, women were entitled to get access to collective agricultural land and means of production. They were assigned collective farming work by the production teams and they were paid according to the work points accumulated. Besides, women received some special privileges in terms of working conditions. For instance, they were often assigned light work such as transplanting, weeding and semi-processing

⁹⁴ White, Ch. Socialist Transformation of Agriculture and Gender Relation. New York: Monthly Press review, 1984.

while men had to do heavier and risky work such as land preparation, irrigation, heavy transport and insecticide spraying. In terms of payment, women received the same number of work points as men who did the same farming work and the same working hours. For example, a man and a woman would receive 10 points for a working day in which where they were assigned to do the same irrigation work in the same place and on the same day. However, it should be pointed out that women were not allowed to do many collective farm jobs identified by the cooperative as men's jobs when men were available and their productive jobs usually gave them lower work points than men's jobs.

Since cooperatives were committed to democratic management, women were eligible to not only discuss cooperative issues but also to vote and to stand for election to cooperative management board when they reached the age of 18. As a result, a considerable number of women were elected in the position of president of the local people's committees or director of the agricultural and business cooperatives especially during the war with the Americans. Due to the lack of female labour and capable men in Vietnam's countryside during the war time, women were highly encouraged and promoted into managerial and leading positions either in agricultural cooperatives or in administrative systems such as provincial or district people's committees.

During agricultural collectivization, there were basic changes in the status of rural women regarding education and health care. They enjoyed the same opportunity to get access to education and other social welfare as men. It was widely noted that rural women benefited a great deal from the subsidy policy of agricultural cooperatives. In almost every village, there was a creche, a kindergarten, a primary education school and a health station. In every district, there was a secondary education school, a hospital and a theatre. Of course, there were some differences between the North and the South, between the delta and the mountainous areas, but in general, rural women received rather good care from the government and the social welfare fund of the agricultural cooperatives in relations to education and health care services. They did not even have to pay for their own and their children's education fee, and sometimes books and other study kits were provided free of charge by the cooperatives.

With regards to health services, rural women were offered medicine and doctor consultations free of charge. Yet, it was also undeniable that medicine was not always adequately available to women when they needed it. However, subsidized provision of medicine and health care was unquestionably helpful to women especially during the war time. A system of clinics and maternal houses were established in almost every commune. Vaccine for people, especially children, was also offered free of charge.

A variety of social and cultural activities were organized by cooperatives. Clubs of farmers, fishers, pig keepers, orchards for old people, unions for women to mention a few. Such activities encouraged women to actively take part in the social life of the rural community. The fund for these activities was normally provided by cooperatives.

Since the principle of agricultural cooperatives was to ensure an equal income distribution to every co-op member, it was hard to see a big difference in terms of living standards among rural women. It has been noted that under the collective system, Vietnamese farmers were generally in the same economic situation. For women living without husbands, especially martyrs' mothers and women whose husbands died in the front, cooperatives took care of them. They were frequently assigned light collective work, and given subsidized food and other basic needs for their lives. Their children also received special help from teachers and friends at school. Many children from the martyrs' families were sent abroad to study.

However, the collective system affected rural women adversely. For instance, in spite of the increased proportion of women who rose to leadership and management positions during the period of collectivization, especially during the war time, in the countryside of Vietnam, women still remained a minority in cooperative management. Those who were in such leadership positions had to cope with many problems,

especially male resistance to the loss of patriarchal authority.

Regarding the sexual division of labour, cooperatives divided agricultural work into two categories, one assigned to women and the other to men. Men's tasks were always defined as important and technically demanding; therefore, their payment was often higher than that of women. For example, ploughing was given 12 points per day while transplanting was given only 9 points per day⁹⁵. The explanation was that ploughing was more difficult and energy-consuming than transplanting. However, usually women were not assigned by cooperatives to do work which was considered as men's task whenever there was a man available for this type of work in the cooperatives. Even when women in the cooperatives worked hard, they rarely received income higher than that of their men. From the above illustration, it can be seen that on the one hand, the sexual division of farm labour in agricultural cooperatives helped women to assume lighter and less risky work. On the other hand, it prevented women from getting access to important, highly paid and technologically oriented-work such as ploughing, harrowing, mechanical land preparation, water pump operation. These jobs were thought to be suitable only to male labourers.

⁹⁵ Doan Trong. Vietnamese Country Women, their Situation and Aspiration. Agricultural Publishing

House,

1984.

Due to the inefficiency of the collective production system, food production during the period under agricultural collectivization was relatively low. Obviously, many peasant families lacked food for their families's consumption and the money needed for other basic needs was also in short supply. This weighed heavily on the life of rural women. Like many developing countries in the world, in Vietnam, when food shortage occurred, it did not affect all members of the family in the same way. Generally, the food consumption of women and girls was reduced much more than that of boys and men. Also, in this context, women's access to education, health care and other needs were also limited.

Finally, the centrally planned agricultural economy made rural women "as co-op members" very passive in production and business. Being used to be given instruction of daily farming work by the chief of the production teams, women were likely to work for the cooperatives as hired labourers rather than "real collective masters" of the cooperatives. They were not prepared to be creative and think how to organize agricultural production and how to make it economically efficient. Yet, it was true that cooperatives often had meetings where all co-op members were invited to exchange ideas. However, at these gatherings, cooperatives' management staff had the tendency to give "top-down" instructions rather than to get initiatives and suggestions from farmers concerning cooperative production and business activities. As a result, co-op members (men and

women) gradually became dependent on the ideas of the cooperative management board members. Therefore, after several years of a centrally planned economy, farmers lost their creative and dynamic characteristics, this created a difficulty for many men and women to cope with the flexibility of the market-oriented economy introduced in the country in late 1980's.

In summary, during the agricultural collectivization (1960-1987), the role and position of rural women changed radically. They were encouraged to participate in collective production activities. As members of agricultural cooperatives, women made a noticeable contribution to the development of agricultural cooperatives. However, as the revolution progressed, the agricultural collective system was not able to satisfy farmers' basic material needs and make full use of women's potential. Therefore, women's income from collective work was low in relative and absolute terms.

The next chapter presents major new agricultural policies (1987 and 1993) in Vietnam and its mixed impacts on the plight of rural women in Vietnam.

CHAPTER FOUR

RURAL WOMEN IN THE NORTH VIETNAM AFTER AGRICULTURAL REFORMS (1987-1993)

4. Agricultural new policies in Vietnam (1987-1993)

4.0 Objectives

From 1987 to 1993, the government of Vietnam has carried out several new socio-economic policies for the economic development of the economy in Vietnam. Of these policies, the policy on agricultural reform is the most important. The main objectives of these reforms are aimed at attaining food self-sufficiency for the country and improving living standards of the Vietnamese people. These objectives are as follows:⁹⁶

- To eliminate the collective ownership of land and other means of agricultural production by cooperatives
- To change the managerial mechanism of agricultural production
- To facilitate a wide-range of agricultural activities and side-line occupations
- To introduce a market-oriented economic system in agricultural production

⁹⁶ Ibid.

4.1 New agricultural policies

To fulfil the above objectives, since 1987, the government of Vietnam has adopted a new set of new policies in agricultural sector as follows:

Policy on land

After the land law was passed by the National Assembly on 29th December, 1987. Agricultural land was allocated to farmers on a long-term and stable basis. It is an extremely important point toward the agricultural renovation process with considerable socio-economic and juridical significance. Its main objective was to gradually give farmers the direct management of arable land and the access to private land use in order to facilitate their making full use of land resources for production purposes. The following were the main contents of the land law⁹⁷:

- The collective possession of agricultural land by the cooperatives was abandoned.
- Land was allocated to individual farmers (men and women) for agricultural purpose on a stable and long-term contract rather than a private ownership. Equality among peasant households was the basic principle for the reallocation of agricultural land to farmers in the whole country. The amount of land allocated to every peasant household differed among

⁹⁷ Ibid.

communes, districts regions due to their agricultural land available, however, it was based on family size and the number of work-age household members).

- The farmers who received land for long-term tenure had the right to organise their production and were encouraged by the government to intensify cultivation and increase the efficiency of land use.
- Farmers are given rights to reclaim and cultivate barren hills, coastal areas, unused land in order to expand the areas under cultivation and create employment.

In July 1993, The National Assembly passed a land tenure law which allowed farmers to transfer, rent and inherit the right to use farmland. From now on, farmers can use land for 20 years for cultivation of annual crops and 50 years for perennial crops, thus encouraging farmers to make long-term investment in agricultural production.

The land law also set concrete regulations on land use for administrative and residential purposes. For instance, the government fixed a certain portion of land for agricultural production, housing and office use in every province. This is to avoid the wastage of arable land for unnecessary purposes, a serious occurrence under the collective system. Even though, land was not privatized, peasant households can use land use certificates as collateral to borrow money for

their investment in agricultural production or business⁹⁸. With the new land law, peasant households have been fully mobilized for producing more food for themselves and society because they became real owners of their production land.

Policy on peasant household economy and multi-economic sector in agriculture

Previously, in the centrally-planned economy system, the agricultural economy of Vietnam was mainly based on the state and collective economic sector and the role of household economic sector was not properly recognized. Now, peasant households were defined by the government as an independent economic production unit with the right of long-term use of agricultural land and other means of production. Each household represents a production and trading unit officially protected by the law. They are eligible to establish various kinds of production and business cooperatives or join-venture relationships with other local and foreign partners on the basis of mutual benefits. Peasant households are allowed to make decisions in relation to their own production and business activities. They are also expected to be responsible for their own benefits and losses. The role and functions of the agricultural and business cooperatives are to be reconsidered. They are no longer responsible for regulating the daily agricultural production activities of its members such

⁹⁸ Ibid.

as assigning farm work and business activities for co-op members. Their only duties are to offer farmers agricultural services such as purchasing agricultural inputs, marketing farm products or technical advices on a commercial basis. The collective means of production and other common resources which were inefficiently used should be transferred into farmer household's possession by ways of selling or leasing⁹⁹.

Policy on agricultural land utilization tax

During and after the American war, the income through the agricultural tax was an important source for the government budget. In 1988, The government promulgated a new policy on agricultural tax for farmers in the whole country. With this new tax, the government of Vietnam reduced about 40% of the previous amount of tax farmers used to pay before. As a result, the total income of the government through agricultural tax is 800.000 tons per year compared to 1.2 or 1.3 million ton per year under the previous system¹⁰⁰.

Policy on science, technology and agricultural extension

To promote scientific investment in agriculture and transfer new technologies to farmers, the government of Vietnam approved many programmes and projects on science and

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Speech addressed by Mr Nguyen Cong Tan, Minister of Agriculture and Food Industry of Vietnam at Vietnam-IRRI (International Rice Research Institute). Ha Noi: May, 1993.

4technology and agricultural extension. In March 1992, a resolution on science, technology and agricultural extension was promulgated. As a result, a number of scientific advances, especially, on rice production and animal husbandry have been transferred to farmers, thus helping them to increase yield of crops and animals and economic efficiency of side-line occupation and business, improving their income and living standards.

Policy on credit for peasant households

Peasant farmers now have land, labour, however, they face a serious shortage of capital to invest in their production. To help farmers with capital, in July 1991, the government of Vietnam adopted the resolution N° 202/CT concerning policy on credit for peasant households. Since then, farmers have got access to government loan for their purchase of agricultural material such as fertilizer, insecticide, agricultural machineries. In 1993, the number of peasant households received government credit was over 3 millions and the amount of money lent for farmers was 4000 billion dong (Vietnamese currency). This not only helps peasant households in Vietnam to have more investment capital but also to reduce their

borrowing from non-institutional-high interest rate creditors in rural areas¹⁰¹.

Policy on circulation of agro-products and agricultural input

Since 1988, the government of Vietnam has applied a new mechanism of agro-product circulation which allows farmers to have a free circulation for selling their products and buying input materials at the right place and right price. It implies that the price of agricultural inputs as well as agricultural products in Vietnam is now negotiated by both sellers and buyers. Farmers are free to purchase agricultural inputs as well as to market their agricultural commodities as desired. The previous price mechanism "price fixed by the state" is eliminated. In addition, the government has also implemented the policies to stabilize the price of agricultural input and agricultural product not too low and not too high for farmers. To do this, the government has used national reserve fund as a state instrument to regulate the relation between demand and supply of major agro-products and inputs such as chemical fertilizer and rice. At present, food security stocks are maintained in all provinces.

¹⁰¹ Paper presented by Mr Nguyen Ich Chuong, Deputy-Director, international Cooperation Department, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of Vietnam at the Conference "Business & Investment Opportunities in Vietnam". Washington D.C May 19-20, 1994.

Policy on hunger eradication, poverty alleviation, employment and rural development

Since the implementation of a market economy, rural stratification has become a serious phenomenon in Vietnam's countryside. In this context, the government adopted a policy on hunger eradication and poverty alleviation. The policy has been implemented since 1992. The nature of this policy is to base on community's participation to help the poor to get access to capital, technical training for a better and more economically effective production. State fund is also available for poor rural areas, especially, mountainous regions, minority people and people in remote areas. The government also pays a great attention on generating fund to create more jobs for farmers at their native villages and to people in new settlement areas. Apart from that, a number of programmes, projects and activities toward rural development such as clean drinking water, education, health care, rural transport have been a great concern of the government.

4.2 Economic reform as a strong basis for agricultural development

In parallel with the agricultural reform, the government has also implemented a number of new policies in different sectors of the country's economy such as banking system, Industrial sector, foreign trade, service sector. The

following is milestones in the entire economic reform process not including agricultural reforms (1987-1993) in Vietnam¹⁰²:

- 1987 * Ration system was abolished for many commodities.
* International trade was liberalized.
* Enactment of a foreign Investment Code, followed by laws and regulations
- 1988 * Increased autonomy given to state agricultural and industrial enterprises
* Initial reform of the banking system
- 1989 * Wide-ranging price reform, the distinction between official price and market price was abolished
* Trade liberalization was intensified, private sector was allowed to produce export commodities and trade with foreign partners, export subsidies were abolished and import-export quotas were significantly reduced.
* Fiscal reforms were introduced, including a broadening of the tax base and equal tax rates applied to all economic sectors.
- 1990 * National Assembly adopts the law on Private Business and the Law on Companies, allowing the establishment of private businesses.
* Initial restructuring of state enterprises: merging or dissolution of loss-making enterprises.
- 1991 * Broadening of trade relations
* Promulgation of Law on Universalisation of Primary Education and Protection and Care of children.
- 1992 * Adoption of series of degrees concerning reorganization of state enterprises
* Tight fiscal and monetary measures, sharply reducing the rate of inflation and introduction of real positive interest rates.
* Adoption of a new Constitution, introducing changes to democratic freedoms and property rights, and right with free business activities in line with law.
- 1993 * Relicensing of all state enterprises; all forms of subsidised credit to state enterprises were eradicated.
* Continued renovation of fiscal reform, introduction

¹⁰² Source: Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Vietnam: A Development Perspective. Prepared for Donor Conference, Ha Noi, September, 1993.

of new salary policy for public and state enterprise workers.

The new economic policies have introduced radical changes in the country exerting major impact on all sectors of Vietnam's economy. Price control on most goods and services have been removed, government subsidies such as state subsidies on food and agricultural inputs (fertilizer and insecticide) have been effectively eliminated, trade restrictions have been relaxed, the legal framework for private sector activities have been expanded, state enterprises have been given autonomy for making production and business decisions. Foreign investment is being actively encouraged; a new foreign investment law promulgated in 1988 and amended in December 1992 sets favourable investment conditions, and offers financial incentives as well as provision for full profit repatriation and guarantees against nationalization. By the end of 1992, some 370 joint-venture projects, with a value of 3,673 million US dollars, have been licensed¹⁰³.

In addition, the government of Vietnam has strongly supported the development of a multi-sector economy, and recognized and confirmed the important of the non-state economic sector. The growth in industrial output was almost

¹⁰³ Le Van Toan. Vietnam Socio-Economy 1991-1992 and the First half of the 1993. Ha Noi: Statistical Publishing House, 1993.

13% in 1992¹⁰⁴, however, the most significant growth rate of economic development in Vietnam over the recent years has been in the private sector. In regards to economic achievement during the reform process, Vietnam has made a great progress in terms of per capita GDP, now, Vietnam is ranked 115 out of 173 countries in the world, while before the reform, Vietnam was ranked 156 out of 173 countries according to the Human Development Index¹⁰⁵.

4.3 Achievement of agricultural new policies (1987-1993)

4.4.0 Economic performance

The economic achievements of these economic reform policies, especially agricultural reforms, were immediate and spectacular. The most outstanding achievement was a stable increase in food production during the past five years as shown in the following table:

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ **UNDP. Human Development Report. New York: UNDP, 1993.**

TABLE 2
TOTAL FOOD PRODUCTION (1988-1992)
(Million tons of rice equivalent)

1988	1989	1990	1991	1992
15.5	21.43	21.48	21.71	24.1

(1992 annual report, Ministry of Agriculture, Vietnam)

It was also reported that the annual rice yield per hectare increased from 3-4 tons before 1988 to 7-8 tons in many localities of Vietnam's countryside¹⁰⁶. The animal husbandry sector has also recorded very impressive results in terms of growth. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the remarkable achievement of Vietnam over the past five years has transformed Vietnam from a food importer become the third largest rice exporter in the world after Thailand and the United States.

4.4.1 Social performance

It has been confirmed by many Vietnamese and foreign researchers that the changes in agriculture has brought about

¹⁰⁶ Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry of Vietnam. Report on the Agricultural Production in 1992. Ha Noi: Agricultural Planning Department, 1993.

many significant social changes for Vietnamese in general and farmers in particular. At the same time, income and living standards of the majority of rural population have increased. The United Nations Development Programmes (UNDP) stated that before 1988 average income growth per capita in Vietnam was 1.18 percent but it was 6 percent in the period between 1988 and 1990¹⁰⁷.

As a result of the economic performance of the agricultural reform, the face of the Vietnam's countryside has considerably changed. Brick houses make up 40 percent of all houses in rural areas of Vietnam. About half of them have been newly built. Peasant households have more money to buy new furniture and many families become rich through their farming and side-line occupations. According to the results of the population census in 1989, the number of landless people occupies a very small proportion of the population. It was only 1.4 to 1.5 percent.

4.4 Impacts of agricultural reforms (1987-1993) on rural women in Vietnam

The agricultural reform (1987-1993) has changed dramatically the role and status of Vietnamese women in the North. Five years have been passed since the implementation

¹⁰⁷ **UNDP and the State Planning Committee of Vietnam, Vietnam Agricultural Sector Review.** Ha Noi: 1990.

of agricultural reform in Vietnam. It is undeniable that several remarkable and unexpected changes have recently taken place in rural areas of Vietnam. The agricultural reforms have created many new opportunities for women's economic, social and political development. However, at the same time, there have also appeared considerable challenges and problems for them.

4.4.0 Opportunities

Since the introduction of the agricultural reforms in 1988, Food production has increased. In general, family incomes are higher and there is always availability of consumer goods for farmers to purchase, therefore, peasant's lives have been improved. Many restrictive economic rules and regulations have been lifted and farmers especially, women have more control over their production and their lives.

Since peasant household has been able to act as an independent economic unit. It requires that every member of the peasant household be actively involved in making the plot of arable land allocated to their family more productive. The cooperatives are no longer involved in managing co-op members's daily production. The peasant family must now take all of the responsibilities for their own production and business activities namely agricultural production planning, farming production and marketing of their products. This

forces all members of the family to unit and share responsibilities and accountability to reduce poverty as quickly as possible. In these circumstances, the head of the household (usually the husband) needs the cooperation of all members of the family especially the help from his wife. Hitherto, the husband did not have to get his wife's cooperation because they both were members of agricultural cooperatives. They were normally instructed by the cooperatives' management board to perform production work. In the new economic system, the husband not only needs his wife's active contribution in farming work but also in making decisions on production organisation, purchasing inputs and marketing products. He does not want to bear the whole economic burden on his own. For instance, if the harvest is good, there is no problem. In case, the harvest turns out to be bad, the family does not have enough food to survive, then he will be blamed. It is, therefore, better for him to discuss all these concerns with his family, especially to get advice from his wife.

It is in this context that women have good opportunities to actively participate in the planning, management and marketing decisions on agricultural production in her family. It is also evident that from this step, women have a better chance to apply their wisdom and talent for their family production and business. Consequently, their role and position in the family have changed.

The new policies have provided women with choice of different jobs other than farming. In the Delta, apart from household agricultural production, women have assumed a variety of alternative occupations and responsibilities. Some have raised pigs, chicken, ducks, or fish. Some have invested in small grocery shops, while others have been busy making handicrafts. In the hilly and mountainous areas, women have practised a model of agriculture and forestry in combination. Apart from farming activities, women have been involved in reforestation. In the costal areas, women's side-line occupations have included prawn and fish raising. All these farming and side-line activities have not only provided women with new employment opportunities but also helped increase their income. Additionally, with increased involvement in specialized work such as animal breeding, nursery preparation, dairy and meat cattle raising and vegetable and fruit tree growing, women have learnt new skills and techniques of crop production and animal husbandry. Furthermore, women's knowledge about small trade has improved as well.

Being active and creative in various agricultural production and side-line occupational activities and with their capacity and hard work, the income of many women from farm and non-farm activities has significantly increased. This has helped to change the outmoded thinking that women had to be submissive and home-bound. As a result, these women receive more respect from their male counterparts and people

in the village. Consequently, their role in the rural society has been enhanced. It is clear that the household economy has rapidly improved the life of the majority of rural women especially those who have had adequate capital and enough workers in their households. As food production is increased, the living standards of many peasant households have increased. It is also true that the household economy will not only assure farmers an adequate supply of food but also provide them with extra-income for their family's other expenditures. This has allowed women to have a better economic life and to stop worrying about food shortage problem. Thus making women feel happier and work harder to get more income for their families.

Furthermore, agricultural reform has broadened the vision of many women. Some women have gained new understanding about planning and managing their own agricultural production. They have also come to realize that families with better knowledge about economic management and agricultural cultivation techniques have usually been more successful. From this point of view, they have become more aware of their inadequate knowledge about technical and business matters. Therefore, they have tried very hard to learn various ways to overcome what seems to be a major handicap. As a result, many women are now very successful in agricultural and trading activities, and they are also capable of competing with their

male counterparts not only in technical work but also in managerial positions and business.

One of the advantage of the household economy in agriculture is that it implies the principle of "to each according to his or her work". Now there is no collective distribution of work points and output by the agricultural cooperatives. In contrast, payment and remuneration are directly linked to output. Apart from agricultural tax, irrigation fee and the money spent on agricultural inputs, the reminder of total production belongs to peasant households. As a result, the more products farmers produce on their land, the higher income they will earn.

It is widely recognized by many feminist such as Nguyen Thi Vinh Thi, Le Thi, Hoang Thi Lich that women are now more flexible in dividing their work between farming activities and domestic chores¹⁰⁸. Such flexibility can be possible now because under the household economy, men and women are more likely to work on the land allocated to their family rather than work collectively with other male and female co-op members in the cooperatives as they did under the collective system. The advantage of this change is that women do not have to follow an "administrative working schedule". They can feel free to organize their own working time as they want.

¹⁰⁸ Le Thi. Some Remarks about the Present Situation and Orientations for Improving Living and Working Conditions of Vietnamese Women. Ha Noi: Centre for Women Studies, 1991. Women

They can work in the field or stay at home whenever they want. They can also go to the field early as required to do other activities. However, the housework is still a heavy burden for women. They have to spend many hours to fulfil their reproductive duties with a little help or without help from their husbands.

4.4.1 Challenges

It is unquestionable that the household economy is a great challenge for many women. They have to cope with a real competitive agricultural economy which they had never experienced before. The new economic mechanism requires a good knowledge about market and economic management. For this women need at least to have a basic education and technical training in the areas of their farming and related activities such as agro-processing and business. The main problem is that the collective system was likely not to encourage women to learn how to do business. Therefore, many of them have had difficulties entering into the new market mechanism and have been very far behind from their male counterparts. Unfortunately, the kinds of work which men were assigned under the old system provided them with skill and knowledge with which they could better function under the household economy. As a result, female farmers have been slower than their male

counterparts in adapting to the new agricultural economic mechanism.

4.4.2 Problems

Despite these above achievements, the new sexual division of labour has incredibly increased women's work burden. Land reclamation, reforestation, food crop intensification, and side-line occupations require that women have to work harder, cultivate more land, tend more animals and spend more hours on making handicraft items for export. Besides, they still have to do the same bulk of "invisible" domestic work in the family. This heavier burden has made women exhausted, weaker and more vulnerable to diseases¹⁰⁹.

Under the household economy, the vast majority of rural women (97 percent according to the 1989 census) have engaged in economic activities, whether in farming production or side-line occupations. The results of recent research by Vietnamese sociologists have shown that rural women have spent nearly 18 hours a day doing farm work and house chores while men have spent only 14 hours¹¹⁰. It has been also found out that some rural men have helped women with housework and

¹⁰⁹ Le Thi. Some Remarks about the Present Situation and Working Conditions of Vietnamese Women. Ha Noi: Centre for Women Studies, 1990.

¹¹⁰ Brazier, C. Vietnam, the Price of Peace. Quebec: Oxfam, 1992.

shared the responsibility in looking after their children , but domestic work and child rearing remains the main responsibility of women.

Agricultural activities in a poor country like Vietnam are characterized mainly by manual labour. Since the introduction of the household economy, agricultural cooperatives no longer take care of land preparation work and heavy transport. As a result, women and men must now prepare their own land plots. Most peasant households try to save the costs of land preparation by using buffalo or even simple tools such as hoe or a shovel to prepare the land. These approaches not only result in low productivity but also consumes more time and energy of women¹¹¹. Concerning transport, the main transport means of women in rural areas is a pole and two hangers. Using this simple transport means, they usually carry chemical fertilizers and insecticides, green manures, seedlings and rice on their shoulders.

Another adverse effect of the new sexual division of labour on women's working conditions is that with the household economy women have to share farming work such as land preparation, heavy transport, and insecticide spray with their husbands or do it on their own especially in cases of female headed households. While practising insecticide spray,

¹¹¹ Le Thi. Report on the Study on Truc Dai Commune, Hai Hau District, Ha Nam Ninh Province. Ha Noi: the Centre for Women Studies, 1991.

due to their physical size and lack of technical training, many women have been poisoned by being exposed to toxic insecticide¹¹². It is worth remembering that, under the collective production system, the workload was shared more widely among co-op members. Therefore, heavy and risky work such as ploughing, heavy transport or insecticide spray were frequently done by male labourers according to the work division of the cooperatives. Women, especially weak and pregnant women, did not have to do heavy work. The result of a recent study undertaken by the agricultural planning and projection research Institute, Ministry of agriculture and Food Industry in forty five districts in the North of Vietnam (table 3) on the female division of farming work within the household economy helps make this statement clearer (see table 3)¹¹³.

Through these figures, one can see that with the household economy, the sexual division of farming work has tremendously changed. Women do many heavy and risky work which used to be considered as male jobs in the previous production system.

¹¹² Vo Hung. Some questions of biomedicine about rural women in Vietnam. Ha Noi: Agricultural Publishing House, 1991.

¹¹³ Nguyen Thi Hien and Vu Thi Ngoc Tran. "Phu Nu va Su Phat Trien Kinh Te Ho o Vietnam." Women and the Household Economy in Vietnam. Agricultural Publishing House, 1992.

TABLE 3

**PERCENTAGE OF FARM WORK DONE BY WOMEN COMPARED TO MEN
(1992)**

	Done by women	Done by men
Land preparation	70%	30%
Transportation of manure	58%	42%
Rice transplanting	79%	21%
Crop harvesting	73%	27%
Livestock	74%	26%

Under the household economy, women are more flexible to organize their productive and reproductive work. However, due to this flexibility, they have worked more in both productive and domestic spheres. Consequently, women do not have time to rest and participate in social, political and cultural activities. They are busier with many farm and non-farm work and activities and have no time to study, read news paper, watch television or listen to the radio¹¹⁴.

Even though women are now economically better off. However, the degree to which women benefit from the new agricultural mechanism depends a great deal on their families' labour force, their own management capability and technical knowledge. Those who have limited labour resources, no

¹¹⁴ Le Thi. The Impacts of Vietnamese Government's New Socio-Economic Policies on the Life of Rural Women in Vietnam. Ha Noi: Centre for Women Studies, 1990.

technical and management skills and no capital have encountered several difficulties in making a living for themselves and their families. Many of them can not produce enough food for their families's needs and have been worse-off. These cases are frequently found in the families who have many children and in the families where women are living without husbands. As mentioned earlier in the introductory part of this paper, these women are either martyrs' mothers, widows or single mothers. Due to the consequences of the two wars with French and American, the number of women living without husbands in the countryside of Vietnam is very high. According to the results of the research undertaken by Le Thi in 1990, the average number of female headed households in Vietnam is about 20 percent but in some rural areas, it reaches 40 percent¹¹⁵. The survey in Truc Dai commune, Ha Nam Ninh province conducted in 1990 by the Centre for Women Studies found that there were 30 widows and 130 families where parents had sons who died in the war with the Americans. At the same time, there were 60 demobilized sick soldiers and 70 handicapped soldiers who were cared for by their families, especially their wives¹¹⁶.

¹¹⁵ Le Thi. Vietnamese Women and National Development until the year 2000, Fundamental Orientations for Jobs, Income Generation and Poverty Alleviation for Women. Ha Noi: Centre for Women Studies, 1992.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

It has been observed by Nguyen Thanh Tam (1992) that almost all women living without husbands are in difficult circumstances¹¹⁷. They have to take care of children without adequate social welfare and within the new household economy which emphasizes productive labour. Without a man to help with heavy work such as land preparation, heavy transport and harvesting, these women have to do it by themselves or hire workmen. This will automatically reduce the income derived from their land. In many rural areas throughout the country, women living without husbands have hardly received financial support from the local authorities even the martyrs wives¹¹⁸. These families are those who sacrificed the most for the country during the war, and now they are the most disadvantaged families in the market economy. Many of them become worse-off due to the lack of labour force and limited land since the agricultural land is allocated to farmers on the basis of the number of labourers and children in every household. Children get only half as much land as adults. Therefore, female headed households usually have much less land and fewer workers than the male headed households¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁷ Nguyen Thanh Tam. Remarks on the Women living without husbands, 1992. Ha Noi: Social Science Publishing House, 1990.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Le Thi. Report on the Results of the Survey in Truc Dai Commune, Hai Hau District, Ha Nam Ninh Province August 1991. Ha Noi: The Centre for Women Studies, 1991.

Under agricultural collectivization, health care and education used to be the fields which recorded outstanding achievements. In those days, the number of children went to school was very high and almost all rural women received health care from the government. Now, the government no longer provides educational fees, or public health care. This has had a direct negative impact on the children's education and the protection of women's health. For instance the abolition of the state subsidies in education have heavily affected the system of creches and kindergartens. In the whole country, a great number of creches and kindergartens have been closed and the teaching quality is very low. To overcome this problem, in many areas, the local government have offered special payments to baby sisters and teachers in order to maintain the creches and kindergartens's system. For example, in Truc Dai commune, Ha Nam Ninh province, 18 creches and 20 kindergartens were staffed with 60 baby sisters. The local government had to pay 170 kilogramme of paddy per crop to a baby sister and 200 kilograms of paddy to a kindergarten teacher. In addition, they were allocated the same amount of land as other women in the commune to do farming¹²⁰.

Education is free of charge only for the first grade. When children go to the second grade, parents of children in the second grade have to pay not only school fees but also contribute money to upgrade schools and buy teaching kits.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

This has become a real burden for poor families especially those who have more than two children. This is one of the causes of a number of children, especially girls, leaving school early. Nowadays, there is a tendency in the countryside for only boys to be given family support to get higher education while girls have to drop out of school after they finish their primary education. In poor families, girls are often not allowed to go to school at all. These factors have prevented poor women from advancing further. With limited education, they are certainly not be able to learn new economic and technical skills. The survey undertaken in Truc Dai commune, Ha Nam Ninh province, indicates that twenty four percent of children in the one hundred and fifty interviewed families left school early. Ten left school when they were in the first grade and thirty five children left school when they were in the second grade and two when they were in the third grade. These children belong to thirty families in the commune. Fourteen families have adequate food and basic needs, twelve families lack food and eleven families are very poor. Asked about the reason which made their children leave school early, seventy per cent of these families said their children could not go on to study due to financial difficulties and thirteen percent said they need children's labour¹²¹.

¹²¹ Ibid.

The abolition of state subsidies on health care have also had a serious impact on the health of rural women, especially the poor who can not financially afford to buy medicine or consult a doctor. As a proportion of income, expenditures for medical care are enormous for families who are poor and have sick family members. Since the public welfare for health care has been reduced communal clinic and maternal houses have collapsed. They lack medicines, medical instruments and even nurses and doctors. This has caused great deal of trouble for rural women when they are sick and deliver babies.

In the book "Vietnam, the Price of Peace" the comment is made that:

"Central planning may have failed to supply people's material needs, but it did mean that people had equal access to a comprehensive system of health care and education. Now the gap between the rich and the poor is widening and there are few state funds to pay for the public services of which the Vietnamese were once justly proud. The feeling of general equality and collective purpose that once infused the North in particular, is now being eroded¹²²".

With the household economy, many new equalities have been introduced but at the same time, new inequalities have also emerged. The benefits brought about by the new economic mechanism have created considerable disparities from household

¹²² **Brazier, C. Vietnam, the Price of Peace. Quebec: Oxfam, 1992.**

to household and from woman to woman. Obviously, the households which have got adequate amounts of labour and capital usually have become better-off very quickly. In contrast, the households whose labour power has been limited have had more difficulties than under the collective system. As a result, the gap between the poor and the rich, and the two parent and female headed single parent families in the countryside has been getting wider and wider.

In summary, through the sources of reference available to the author of this study, it is argued that the agricultural reforms in Vietnam in the period between 1987 and 1993 brought about several positive changes to rural women in the North of Vietnam. However, many adverse impacts have also influenced women's life, especially women living without husbands.

The following chapter will provide an overview of the findings of a field research in the North of Vietnam from April 15 to August 15, 1994. A discussion of major impacts of the agricultural reform (1987-1993) on women in the North of Vietnam and on the differentiation in the way the agricultural reform has affected men and women will be also presented as result of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE

GENDER DIFFERENTIATED IMPACTS OF THE AGRICULTURAL CHANGING POLICIES (1987-1993) IN VIETNAM

5. Overview of the field research in Vietnam (April 15 to August 15, 1994)

In this field research, I will illustrate the major gender differentiated impacts of the agricultural changing policies (1987-1993) in the North of Vietnam. The findings and discussion in this chapter will form a basis for recommendations for more appropriate agricultural policies which are expected to promote overall development for rural women during Vietnam's actual agricultural transitional process.

5.0 Methodologies

The aim of this study was to acquire qualitative and quantitative data of the agricultural reform in Vietnam in the period between 1987 and 1993 and its differential impacts on men and women. The field research was undertaken in Ha Noi and in Tuyen Quang province in Vietnam from April 18 to August 6, 1994 (see attached a map of Vietnam and a map of Tuyen Quang province). It was divided into three steps.

In the first step, from April 22 to May 26, I conducted fourteen individual interviews with key-informants from various central management and research institutions in the Capital of Ha Noi namely leaders of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, agricultural-policy makers, researchers from the centre for women studies and the Vietnamese women union (see attached, a list of key-informants at central level, appendix II). The discussions with leaders of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry: Mr Nguyen Cong Tan, Minister of the Ministry, Mr Ngo The Dan, Vice-Minister, Mr Nguyen Van Tiem, Director of Agricultural Economic Research Institute gave me a great opportunity to learn more about recent policies promulgated by the government of Vietnam such as the land tenure law (1993) and policy on relicensing of all state agricultural and industrial enterprises. The two hour open-ended interviews with women researchers, namely Mrs Hoang Thi Lich, Deputy-Director of the Centre for Women Studies and Mrs Cao Thi Hao, Agricultural management Department, Ministry of agriculture and Food Industry, allowed me to discuss the impacts of the agricultural collectivization (1960-1987) and the agricultural reforms (1987-1993) on rural women in the North of Vietnam. In addition, I also received their advice on adjusting the questionnaire prepared for individual interviews and a group discussion at the local level in order to make sure that the language and the questions were appropriate and easy enough

for farmers' to understand and respond to. Finally, more data and information regarding the above research topic were also collected from various information centres and libraries located in Ha Noi such as the Centre for Agricultural Information, library of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry, Library of the Social Science Committee, offices of International Organizations in Ha Noi such as UNDP, FAO, UNICEF etc.

In the second step, from May 28 to June 19, I went to Tuyen Quang province to conduct some interviews with provincial leaders and select a commune in the province for a case study. During 21 days spent in Tuyen Quang, I had the opportunity to undertake eight discussions with leaders of Tuyen Quang province and people from the management unit of a project funded by the (IFAD) International Fund for Agricultural Development, namely Mr Nguyen Trung Nhat, President of Tuyen Quang People Committee, Mrs Ha Thi Khiet, president of Tuyen Quang People's Council and some other experts working at the provincial people's committee (see attached a list of interviewed people at provincial level, appendix III). These interviews helped me to collect data concerning the physical features and socio-economic situation of Tuyen Quang province. Seven days working with Mrs Oanh, President of Tuyen Quang Women Union and her staff were extremely useful in helping me understand better the organization and responsibilities of the provincial women's union, as well as the status of rural women

in the recent agricultural reform process. Mrs Nguyen Thi Nga, staff of the women's union accompanied me during my whole field research in the province. Based on some criteria such as population, per capita income, percentage of female headed households, agricultural development, implementation of new agricultural reform, development of side-line occupations etc, Mrs Nga and I selected Trung Mon commune located in Yen Son district, Tuyen Quang province as a case study (see attached maps of Yen Son district and Trung Mon commune). After going through the questionnaire for interviews at the local level with Mrs Nga, we went to the commune and met with leaders of the commune people's Committee and commune women's union to introduce ourselves and request their assistance in selecting households and people for interviews and group discussion (see attached a list of twenty-one interviewed men and women from three different income groups in Trung Mon commune, appendix IV). The reasons I selected three different variables (income, age, marital status) for three groups of interviewees at the commune level are: first, the "age" variable enables me to get information on two generations of women who represent three different stages of development in Vietnam: before the 1945 revolution, after the revolution (collectivization) and agricultural reforms (the household economy); second, the "income" variable tells me the different impacts brought about by the reforms on different women's income groups (negatively and positively); finally, the "marital status" variable is

useful for me to examine to what extent the recent agricultural policies have differently affected two parent households and female headed households.

The questionnaire for individual and group interviews at the commune level was checked for the third time with people at the commune level. Through discussion with Mr Nguyen Van Duc, Vice-President of Trung Mon commune, Mrs Nguyen Thi Hoa, head of Trung Mon Women Union, and two deputy-heads: Mrs Dao Thi Nham and Mrs Nguyen Thi Nhiep, general information regarding socio-economic features of the commune before and after the reform was collected. Three leaders of the commune Women Union offered me considerable assistance. All of them were with me all the time during my working days in the commune. Finally, the questionnaire was distributed to every interviewee by myself.

The third step from 2 July to July 28, I spent almost three weeks working with male and female farmers. Mrs Nga and three women of the commune women union helped me collect the questionnaire which was filled out by interviewees and also helped to arrange interviews for me. We decided to undertake separate interviews with husbands and wives because we believe that in our culture women tend not to express freely their feelings and problems, especially as relates to negative observations about their husbands behaviour with other people when their husbands are present. Finally, a group discussion with the participation of 32 women guided by the head of Trung

Mon Women Union was organized. The topic for group discussion was differential advantages and disadvantages of the new agricultural policies in the period between 1987 and 1993 on rural men and women. It is worth mentioning that while conducting individual interviews and group observation, I always recorded the conversations to listen to again at home and I took notes on major points of the discussions. Furthermore, a number of slides were also made during my time in the province in order to show the readers of this study the different locations of the field research. The field research was satisfactorily completed in August 5, 1994.

5.1 The case study

The reasons I selected Tuyen Quang province as a case study for this research were; first, I am very familiar with the place and people through my last two years of working as a project controller on a project funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Tuyen Quang province. In this position, I visited the province many times and worked with the provincial leaders. I also had many opportunities to talk to farmers, both men and women. Through these contacts, I got a good understanding about the place and the people. Second, as many other provinces in the North of Vietnam, after the country gained independence from France (in 1954) Tuyen Quang carried out an agrarian reform and then

agricultural collectivization in 1956 by forming thousands of agricultural cooperatives in the province. From 1956 to 1981, Tuyen Quang has gone through two major stages of cooperative development: the formation of small size cooperatives (1956-1976) and large-size cooperatives (1976-1981). In the period between 1981 and 1987, Tuyen Quang implemented the first stage of agricultural reform called the agricultural contract system which allowed peasant households to contract with cooperatives on the basis of final products rather than work points. In early 1988, Tuyen Quang introduced new policies related to agricultural household production and started allocating farming land to peasant households. Third, Tuyen Quang is a typically agro-forest area where farmers practise mixed farming, including wet land cultivation and upland cropping. Apart from food production, farmers in general and women in particular are actively engaged in cash crop production and non-agricultural activities. This is extremely important for me to identify different impacts of the agricultural reform on men and women in terms of a sexual division of labour, the income of men and women and different positive and negative impacts of reform on men and women.

5.1.0 Trung Mon commune

5.1.1 Physical, social and economic features

The Trung Mon commune is one of 135 communes in Tuyen Quang province. It belongs to Yen Son district. According to Mr Dao Van Khang, former president of Yen Son district, Trung Mon is classified as a middle commune in terms of socio-economic development indicators. The total arable land is 327 ha mainly paddy land. Trung Mon has 7,080 people divided into 1608 households. The number of men is 3,505 while the number of women is 4,320. The population growth rate of Trung Mon commune is high at around 2.7% compared with 2.2% for the country as a whole. The average household size is from four to five persons. Around 25% of households are headed by women, mainly older and middle-aged. The majority of them are widows of wars between Vietnam and France, Vietnam and the U.S.A and more recently Vietnam and Cambodia and China. The literacy rate is 82%. Under the previous system, there were three creches, three kindergartens but now, none of them is functioning. One hundred percent of households in the commune have access to electricity for their daily lives.

The highest representative body in the commune is the Commune People's Council with six members who are directly elected by the people, while the highest executive body is the Commune People's Committee comprising the chairman and three

vice chairmen (economic affairs, planning and social affairs). Members of Commune People's Committee are elected by the Commune people's Council from amongst its delegates. Agricultural cooperatives continued to exist in Trung Mon but they are not active. They mainly provide some agricultural services for farmers such as the supply of fertilizer, insecticides, seeds and they are paid for their services. Cooperatives also assume the responsibility of collecting agricultural tax, irrigation and electricity fees. Leaders of the cooperative are elected by the members of the cooperative's Congress.

The Commune Youth Union is comprised females and males between the ages of 15 to 28 years. The Commune Youth Union's objective is to get young people involved in social, economic and cultural activities which provide them a better understanding about economic and social law.

The Commune Women's Union is a branch of Tuyen Quang Women Union. Its main concerns are women and children. The Trung Mon Commune Women Union has three leaders; one head (Mrs Nguyen Thi Hoa), two deputy-heads (Mrs Dao Thi Nhan and Mrs Nguyen Thi Nhiep). At the village level, there are heads of village women's unit.

The Commune Union has four major functions:

- To mobilize women in social activities which concern women and children such as primary health care for

children (immunization, nutrition), family planning, maternal health.

- To encourage women in agricultural and income generating activities particularly in handicraft making, animal husbandry, and family gardening activities.
- To implement projects directed towards women such as credit for rural women through SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency) and IFAD (International Fund For Agriculture Development).
- To assist women in technical training by seeking funding for training programmes such as cultivation technique of hybrid rice varieties, artificial insemination for pig, silkworm raising, coffee and tea cultivation.

The Commune Farmers' Association is also a mass organization. Its main function is to help its members to deal with land and other related issues such as negotiating with the cooperatives in allocating farm land to individual households, approval of credits for peasant households etc. Both men and women at the active working age of a household (in general husband and wife) are eligible to join the Commune Farmers' Association.

With 327 ha of farm land, farmers in the commune grow mainly food crops and some types of cash crops. The typical cropping pattern is one crop of upland rice followed by one or

two crops of cassava or maize. Cash crops such as tea, sugar cane, coffee are planted separately on the hill side plots. Due to low investment, the yield of paddy is very low at around 4 tons to 5 tons per ha per year in irrigated areas and 800 to 1,000kg per ha in the uplands. The labour input required is high due to the fact that few modern cultivation techniques are used and the field is not flat and fertile as in the delta. Some shifting cultivation is still been practised in the commune but not as much as in other parts of the province such as Na Hang and Chiem Hoa districts. Farmers applied manure and a low rate of chemical fertilizer (50 to 70 kg urea per ha). They grow some new varieties of crops such as high yielding rice varieties developed at the International Rice Research Institute and some new varieties of maize and potato. Food crop production is primarily for human consumption and animal husbandry. Cash comes mainly from selling fruits, legumes, dry tea, chicken, pig and goat. The majority of peasant households in the commune are engaged in animal husbandry, particularly in cattle, pig, chicken and goat raising. Cattle especially buffalos are used mainly for land preparation, transport and manure production. They are also sold to some areas in the Red River Deltas. About 80% of peasant households have buffalos. Goats have been newly introduced in the commune by Tuyen Quang Women Union. They are kept mainly for milk and meat.

Since 1993, farm land for annual crop was allocated by the commune people's committee to peasant households for a period of 15 years in the case of annual crops and 50 years in the case of perennial crops. Peasant households have become independent economic entities and are totally responsible for their own decisions as to the cultivation and marketing of their products. Land allocation to peasant households in the commune was based on the number of labourers, children and old people in the household. The amount of land allocated to a labourer is double that given to a non-labourer with reference to children and old people)¹²³. Upland and forest areas for afforestation were also allocated to peasant households on the same basis for a longer period from 25 to 50 years. When I visited the commune, land certificates had not yet been given to peasant household, however, I was told that they will be handed over to them very soon.

5.2 Major findings and discussion

5.2.0 Major findings

Through field research in Vietnam from April 15 to August 6, 1994. I would make general observation that all farmers,

¹²³ A labourer is defined as a male or female farmer at an active working age. Normally, men are considered active labourers from 18 to 60 years old while women are active labourers from 18 to 55 years old.

especially women, including women in the low-income category highly welcomed the agricultural reform. Some of them even said that they want to give praise to the first person who had the initiative to transfer the agricultural collective production system into individual production. They confirm that the peasant household economy is found to be economically more efficient than the collective system. It is also their argument that since the introduction of the new agricultural policies in Vietnam, generally women's income and economic conditions have significantly increased. Unfortunately, it must also be emphasized that these positive changes have also been accompanied by many disadvantages for rural women. The next section elaborates on these positive and negative impacts of the agricultural changing policies on rural women.

5.2.0 Positive impacts

More food is produced, economic condition of a considerable number of women is increased

All people interviewed acknowledge that the most outstanding result of the Vietnam's recent agricultural reform is the increase of food production which has not only transformed the country from a food-deficit country into a third rice exporter but has also improved the economic life of the majority of peasant households.

Mr Nguyen Van Duc, vice president of Trung Mon said that" The reform has unquestionably increased many families's living standards. The number of better-off families in the commune is on the increase especially those who have abundant labour, land and capital for their production. Under agricultural collectivization, more than 60% of peasant households in Trung Mon could not manage to produce enough food for themselves. Many of them were short of food for six months of the year or more. Now, they produce not only enough food for their own consumption, but some families even produce some surplus to sell out".

It is widely recognized by a great number of farmers interviewed, both men and women that with the household economy their income has increased quickly compared to that under the collective system. However, they find it difficult to provide accurate information regarding household income in cash. They do not know exactly how much money they get from their production, so, I decided to assess their income in kind and calculate it into money on the basis of current price of agricultural products given by the planning department of the ministry of agriculture. For example, Mr Hien and Mrs Nhiep from the better-off group said that last year they harvested approximately 4,000kg of rice-paddy, 500 kg of corn grain, 400 kg of dried cassava, 600 kg of live pig, 300 kg of chicken, 120 kg of dried tea, and their buffalo herd delivered 2 calves. In addition, they earned about 300,000 dong from

selling fruits and flowers. The husband also received 1.000.000 dong from his trading on fertilizer and insecticide. Finally, the wife received about 100,000 dong from the work she did with the commune women union in helping to monitor and implement a project on credit for women. So, according to my calculation, last year their net income was about 13.000.000 dong (equivalent to 1,200 US.D), thus making an average income of around 300 US.D for every family member. Whereas, under the collective system, their annual income per capita was much lower¹²⁴. Under the previous system, They received around 1,000 kg of paddy from cooperative work, 200 kg of corn and 20 kg of dried tea from their 5% land plot allocated by the cooperative¹²⁵. At that time, every family might have one or two pigs and some chicken or duck. Pigs had to be sold at a low price fixed by the cooperative. Cooperative farmers were not allowed to raise draught cattle because cattle were considered a collective draught force.

¹²⁴ Since Mr Hien and Mrs Nhiep can not tell me exactly the price of agricultural products during the collective period between 1956 and 1987, I found it impossible to calculate their income under the collective system in money, therefore I compared the average income in kind that Mrs Nhiep earned in the previous system and that earned by their family last year in kind. The result of this comparison showed that their income during the collective period is much lower than the household economy.

¹²⁵ As I mentioned in the third chapter, during agricultural collectivization, every peasant household was given a small piece of land, which is about 5% of the amount of garden land they have now for their private production.

The interviews at the provincial level indicated that the average net income of households of the better-off group of households ranges from 300 US.D to 400 US.D per person per year; those belonging to the middle-income group earn around 200 US.D to 250 US.D per year; and those belonging to the poor group earn from 100 US.D to 150 US.D per year. I must also point out that in all families of the three income groups, women's economic contribution is greater than that of men. However, the richer the household, the greater the income which women earn mainly from non-farming activities. It should be noted that women from the better-off group have not only been active in generating non-farm activities for themselves but they have also created a lot of work for the whole family. Men and children in these families have been found to have more jobs to do compared to families belonging to middle-income and lower-income groups.

As a result of a higher income, in general the living conditions of peasant households in the commune has improved. It was reported that the majority of the better-off and middle-income households have built new houses and bought a television set, motorcycles and milling machines. In the whole commune, there are 500 television sets and 162 motorcycles in the whole commune. On average, there is one television for every three households, while before 1987 there were only some black and white televisions and nine motorcycles in the commune.

Women have more control over their production and business activities

The recent reform policies have created a free working environment for peasant households in the commune. The new policy on the allocation of farm land to farmers for a long period of time has really responded to their desire, thus allowing them to invest in their crop production and animal husbandry. All farmers are encouraged to assume the right to work out their own production plans; take care of their own crops and animal, solve all problems related to their production such as seeking investment capital, the purchase of plant seeds, animal breeds, farming tools and machineries, marketing agricultural products, without the interference of agricultural cooperatives. As result of this change, agricultural production in the commune is largely diversified. Based on the type of soils and investment capital, peasant households are growing different kinds of crops and keep different sorts of animals. Many families have become specialized agricultural production units. Apart from rice production, thirty percent of peasant households in the commune are specializing in tea and coffee. Fifty percent of them invest capital in planting perennial trees such as bamboo, eucalyptus and wood trees on bare hills while the rest are more interested in growing sugar cane and raising chicken, pigs, goat or cattle.

The new production system has improved the capacity of the rural women to plan and manage the family's production and business activities. Many women said that with the opportunity to discuss agricultural planning and management with their husbands, they have gradually become more active in making decisions. With this advance, they feel more confident about their capability. One of the reasons why the new production system has been welcomed by all women is its flexibility in terms of production management and working time. They are more flexible in dividing their working time between farming activities and housework. They can go out to work or do housework whenever they want. To avoid the heat in summer, many women go to the fields very early in the morning. They may start a working day at 5.am in the fields and go home at 10.am to take care of animals and do housework back to work in the field again in the late afternoon. This timetable is more convenient compared to that in the previous system where every cooperative member had to follow strictly the working schedule fixed by the cooperative.

More incentives for women to generate non-farm activities

The household economy is a good base for a diversified agricultural production and an expanded dimension of non-agricultural activities, thus promoting the development of a multi-commodity production economy in the commune which

includes agricultural production, cottage industry, commercial and technical activities.

In many peasant households, the major part of their total income is not necessarily from farming, but it can come from animal husbandry or non-agricultural activities such as handicraft or small trading. Sometimes, the income from these sources may make up fifty to seventy percent of peasant household's total income. It is clear that the income from non-farm activities of the families practising multi-commodity production (crops cultivation, husbandry and side-line occupations) is usually higher than those whose only income source is farming. For example, in the case of Mrs Nhiep (the better-off group), income from rice production accounts for only thirty five percent of her family's total income, while in the case of Mrs Hoa (the poor group), income from rice production takes up ninety five percent of her family's total income. Therefore, it is unquestionable that side-line occupations and non-agricultural activities play a very important role in the increase of farmers' income. This is also an area where women play a major role.

I has observed that all women are very active in creating side-line occupations and non-farm activities for themselves. Some grow fruit trees and or flowers. Some raise cattle, pigs, goats or chicken, while others are involved in for-estation, petty trading, brick making, silkworm raising. The small project on short-term credit for rural women funded by

SIDA (the Swedish Development Agency) and executed by Tuyen Quang Women Union has helped generate an important income for the majority of women in the commune through a variety of side-line occupations. Mrs Huong is a good example of the use of credit for women. With 500,000 dong (equivalent to 40 US.D) borrowed from the project for the first time, she bought two piglets and animal feed for them. Six months later, she sold two slaughtered pigs weighing 120 per each. Part of the profits was used to pay the amount of money owed to the project and the rest was used as a reinvestment fund. She borrowed another 500.000 dong from the revolving fund of the same project. This time she bought two young sows. Six months later, she got seven piglets to sell, not including two pregnant sows. With the money she earned from the piglets, she paid 500.000 dong to the project and then borrowed some more money to buy another couple young sows. When I visited her house, she showed me with pride a new colour television she bought with the money from her last year's income and said that her next year's plan would be to invest in a small rice-milling unit.

With increased involvement in specialized side-line jobs, women in the better-off and middle income groups have not only increased their income but they have also learnt new skills and techniques. Gradually, their knowledge about commodity production has improved, thus creating an important momentum for women's all-sided development. However, it has been

pointed out that women belonging to lower-income groups have several limitations in engaging in non-farm activities. In the case of poor women from two-parent families, their constraints are mainly lack of capital and skills. As for women living without husbands, they have no capital, no skill and no labour. Mrs Hoa, a single woman having one child out of lawful wedlock said that she knows that if she had some chicken, pigs and buffalos like her neighbour, her total income last year would have been three or four times more than it was. The reasons why she was unable to expand her non-farm activities to increase her income was shortage of capital and labour.

The household economy has offered more opportunities for many women to generate income from side-line occupations rather than just farming, the majority of women are very interested in seeking time and capital for these types of activities. Whenever, they have some time free from farming, they are doing some non-agricultural activities. For example, during the time I undertook interviews in Trung Mon commune, one day, due to transport problem, we came almost one hour late for the appointment with Mrs Hong, one of my interviewees of better-off group. When we arrived, she was not there. Her little daughter told us that she did not want to waste time in waiting for us, so, she went to the village market to sell some bananas that she bought from her neighbour to get some marginal profits. She asked her daughter to call her when we

arrived. This story indicated that women from the better-off groups are very keen to work in various side-line occupations. They no longer wait for the cooperative's guidance in making a living but create jobs for themselves. This helps them not only attain more income for their families but also to get more experience with the market economy where people have to rely mainly on their own mind and efforts rather than collective leadership. In my opinion, it is one of the important positive impacts of the new agricultural policies on women.

5.2.1 Negative impacts

There is also negative side to the agricultural changing policies (1987-1993) in Vietnam. On the basis of the case study, I can show that the household economy has caused the following impacts on rural women: (i) the work load of all women from the three income-groups has increased considerably both in terms of time and intensity, (ii) the differentiation in terms of income and living standards among peasant households in general and among women in particular has become a serious problem in the Vietnam's countryside today, (iii) the abolition of state subsidies on health care and education has exerted a very negative impact on the health and education of all women, especially those belonging to low-income group (iv) the status of women as heads of households, especially,

women with children out of lawful wedlock, is much more difficult than before. However, it must be pointed out that while some of these negative impacts are directly linked to the new agricultural policies some are clearly caused by sex stereotypes and male dominant attitude in our culture and society.

Women work's load has increased considerably

Given the multitude of activities involved in the household production system, women generally bear a much heavier labour burden in agricultural production, non-farm activities, and household work than men. In Trung Mon, all women from three different income-groups have been found to take the main responsibility for seeding, transplanting, spreading manure, weeding, harvesting and threshing. ploughing, harrowing and insecticide spraying, defined as men's task under the collective system, are now shared by men and women in complete households and completely done by women in female headed households. All interviewed men and women agreed that women are primarily responsible for animal husbandry, especially, the raising of chicken, pigs and goats. As far as domestic chores are concerned, women are found to be primarily responsible for taking care of the children and the house, cooking for the whole family, purchasing food from the commune market, doing gardening, collecting fire wood,

preparing food for animal and feeding them. In addition, tea picking is also generally done by women.

According to Mrs Hao, a researcher at the agricultural management and policy Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry under the current household economy, rural women work more intensively than before but do not necessarily work more hours than before. This observation may be right if one compares only the number of working hours that women spent on collective work assigned by the cooperative under the previous system with the number of working hours that women spend on the family farming work under the household economy. However, nowadays apart from farming, women spend a lot of time and energy on side-line occupations and non-farm-activities and do the same amount of housework, thus making women's work both longer and more intense. Women's work burden is much heavier than in the collective system. Almost one hundred per cent of interviewed women said that they usually get up at 4 a.m to prepare breakfast for the whole family and to feed the animals. At about 5 a.m in the summer and at 6 a.m in the winter, they start working in the fields. They return home at noon to prepare lunch and do some housework. In the afternoon, they may continue farming in the fields, doing gardening or they get involved in different types of side-line occupations. Normally, their bed time is at 10 p.m or 11 p.m in the evening after doing all daily housework. Mr Duc, vice president of

the commune is a unique man in the commune in that he gets up earlier than his wife in the morning and prepares breakfast for the family and feed for the animals. 100% men and women interviewed in the commune agreed that women's working day is longer and more intensive now compared to the previous system. In average, women spend 15 to 16 hours per day doing farm work, housework and side-line-occupations. They have only one half hour at noon to take a nap and from one to two hours in the evening to watch television or otherwise relax. Men's work load is much less than that of women. Their daily working time is less because they get up later from one to two hours than their wives in the morning and go to bed also from one to two hours earlier at night. Moreover, after working in the field, men usually come home, wash their hands and have a rest because most of the housework has been done by women. Results of the case study also indicates that women from low-income group work more time and more intensively than their husbands in comparison with women of the better-off and middle-income group. So, it can be said that the poorer the household, the more hours and more intensively women work, the more manual work she has to do and the less help she receives from her husband in terms of housework and finally, the less time she has to rest.

Due to a heavier work burden all women said that they can not find much time for leisure and participation in outdoor activities. They do not even have the time to attend meetings

and social activities organized by the Commune Women's Union. Mrs Hoa, head of the Trung Mon women union, commented that: " Now, women are only willing to go to the meeting if they are sure that we discuss issues concerning credit for women. Other issues, such as marriage and teenager's problems seem not to be attractive to them because they think these issues are for a long-term plan and they are not concerned with their family daily needs such as food, shelter. The main point here is they are too busy and they do not want to spend time on some activities which are likely not to give them either free financial or technical support right away". Most of women I interviewed confined themselves to work at home. As a result, their opportunities of getting access to political, social and technical information are less than men. When I asked the question: who participates in technical training, cultural and social activities in the community the most, the husband or the wife? eighty percent of the answers is the husband.

Economic differentiation of women

It is confirmed by the field research that under the new agricultural production system the majority of women are, in general economically better-off. Unfortunately, the degree to which women benefit from the recent agricultural reforms depends largely on their labour and capacity for capital of investment. Peasant households that have abundant farmland, labour, capital and technical knowledge benefit the most from

the new agricultural policies. They have become rich very quickly, while peasant households who have limited farmland, inadequate labour, no capital and technical knowledge are worse-off. Many of them cannot produce enough food for their needs. It has been reported by the interviewees that while, the number of better-off households has increased the number of middle-income has also been on the increase. Around 300 households in the commune are economically better off, 1,229 households are doing fine; and 64 households are worse off. The gap between the rich and the poor is noticeable. Households classified as poor are female headed households and those with many children. Households whose members are lazy and gambling are also amongst the most disadvantaged. Their chance to get out of their poverty is uncertain. These families account for about three percent of the total number of peasant households in the commune. Their situation is much worse now than it was under the collective system where everybody lived on the same source of income distributed by the cooperative. Poor families and female headed households received not only financial support but also labour and food from the cooperative and neighbours. Now, the agricultural cooperative is no longer responsible for individual households. Nobody cares about helping disadvantaged families. As a result, poor people become isolated from the community. Mrs Xen, one of the poorest women in the commune said that life has become too commercialized in the countryside today. Poor

families like hers have a lot of problems in obtaining financial assistance from the community. Her husband is 48 years old and she is 46 years old. Both of them joined the army during the American war. After the war, they demobilized and returned to their village where they started a new life. Due to the lack of capital to purchase fertilizer and insecticide, their crop yield is very low. Although, they work very hard, they can not produce enough food for their seven children and themselves. Last year, their net per capita income was less than 600.000 dong. They ran out of food for five months. Some families had to borrow money from private creditors with a very high interest rate (25% per month) in order to buy food. When payment was due, they had no choice but to sell a part of their farmland to pay their accumulated debt.

Negative impacts of the cut-off of state subsidies in education and health care on women

The abolition of the state subsidies in education has strongly affected the system of creches and kindergartens in the commune. Under the collective system, there were three creches and three kindergartens. Creches were provided for children from six months to three years old and kindergartens provided for children between the age of three and five. Teachers were paid by the cooperative. Now, with the introduction of charges, creches and kindergartens in the

commune have closed. This causes a lot of troubles for women having small children when they work in the fields. In some extended families, parents can help take care of small children, but young couples who live far from their parents have either to pay for child care or carry them to the fields.

There still exists one primary and one secondary school in the commune. Since fees are only free for the first education level, the number of pupils especially females have declined at the second and the third education levels. It was reported that last year there were one hundred thirty five pupils enrolled in the third level school only sixty of which were girls. The explanation for this difference between the number of boys and girls is that when education is paid for, priority is given to boys rather than girls because boys are expected to have a more opportunity to get access to skilled and high paid jobs outside the commune than girls who are thought to be more family oriented.

There still exists two small clinics staffed with twelve physicians and nurses in the commune. The abolition of the state subsidy of health care and the introduction of a fee for health services has negatively effected the lives of all women from different income-groups and children in the commune. Many women find it hard to pay for medicine and hospital fees, especially poor women from low-income group in the commune or those who have a family member suffering from a chronic health problem. Therefore, Many poor women are reluctant to have a

medical check ups and treatment at the commune clinic when they are sick. When I asked women from the low income group what they do if they get sick, most of them said that if they just feel under the weather, they stay at home and take some traditional medicinal herbs rather than to go to the clinic. All women interviewed said that they only go for a medical check ups if they think they are seriously ill and need to be hospitalized. Therefore, many sick women when they arrive at the hospital, they are already in serious health condition.

Status of women as heads of households

In Vietnam, the definition of a female headed household is somehow different from other countries and the types of female headed are also very diversified. Many "female" households are not counted for by population statistics as female headed households because in these families, even though husbands are absent, they are still considered by the society and by their wives to be the head of household. These men are either government officers working in other localities or military men. They are always absent from home. They return home occasionally to visit their families and bring some money for wives and children. In these cases, women have to do all productive and reproductive work by themselves with the help of their children. The difference between military men and government officers is that the former are still considered as labourers in the family and they are allocated

farm land by the cooperative while the latter are not. The reason is that government officers have house provided by the government in the place where they work while military men do not have either house or land allocated by the government.

Female headed households whose fathers or husbands have died in military service do receive financial support from the government which is 40,000 dong per person per month. However, this money is only given to children and old people. The wife is considered an active labourer, so she is not entitled to receive financial help. Martyrs' families are classified as "target groups" for government support programs. They do receive some advantage from the cooperative. For example, they are given the right to choose a close by and more fertile piece of land. However the land quota given to them is the same as other families in the commune. Unmarried women having children out of wedlock are not identified as "target groups"¹²⁶ for government support programme. Therefore, they are not given financial support, or advantage in terms of land allocation, or any other assistance from the local and central government. In fact, they are the most disadvantaged group in the new system. It must be remembered that in Vietnam the majority of women who are heads of the households are those who suffer the war aftermaths more than any one else. They are mothers, widows of war martyrs, wives

¹²⁶ Families identified "target groups" for government financial support programs are those having handicapped or dead military men.

or war invalids. They are also women having children out of lawful wedlock because after a long war period, there is a serious shortage of men in Vietnam. Due to this social problem, many women could not get married, so they decided to have children out of wedlock just to ensure that when they become older, their children can take care of them.

The status of female headed households are worse-off under the new production system. First, the land allocation policy based on the number of labourers and people in the family leads to the fact that female headed households especially, martyrs' wives and women having children out of lawful wedlock have less farming land to till. Second, these families without female active labour, with fewer labourers are always short of labour. This may result in children, especially girls in these families being dropped out of school to help their mother with farm work. Third, women without husbands have to cope with other problems of heavy and risky work. Women have either to hire female labourers for these difficult jobs or do it by themselves. During a short interview with Mrs Hien, president of Thai Binh women's union, I was told a story, one day, she went to a village to control a project for women. In the meeting, she saw a young woman whose back was wet all over. She asked this woman why she got wet. She said that the insecticide sprayer she used was not well tapped, so the water with insecticide leaked out on her back and made her back wet. This young woman is unmarried

with a child. She has very little knowledge about the use of chemical insecticide and spray. Therefore, she put her life in very dangerous situation by toxicating herself with insecticide. Fourth, due to the lack of investment capital and technical and business knowledge, these families are not able to keep up with the latest information and agricultural new technologies. Consequently, they fall far behind male headed households in terms of income and living standards.

During my field research in Trung Mon, I interviewed three women from female headed households: the first (Ms Kiem), is the wife of a deceased military man. The second (Ms Tuy), is a divorced woman; and the third (Ms Hoa) is unmarried, having children out of lawful wedlock. Ms Kiem's husband died in the American war 25 years ago when she was 26 years old. Since then, She has lived with her mother in-law and two children. Now, her children are grown up and have their own families in the same village. Ms Tuy was divorced five years ago. Now, she is living with her 10 years old daughter and 13 years old son. Ms Hoa is 34 years old. She has a one year old son.

In the first case, Ms Kiem is doing fine because her mother in-law receives a monthly financial allowance from the government (40,000 dong) and her children also receive government financial support when they were under working age (below 18 years old). Ms Kiem has some problems with labour and capital but she can easily get help from her children. Her

mother-in-law usually helps her with housework. In the second case, Ms Tuy's husband left her when the new agricultural production system was introduced. Now her children can help her with some domestic work. However, she has to take care of almost all production and domestic activities by herself. Their main source of income is very low. In the third case, Ms Hoa was allocated 720 square meters of paddy land for herself and her child. At present, she stays with her parents because she does not have a house yet. Last year, her main source of income was only 400 kg of paddy which made up 90% of her total net income. She lacked food for four months. This year, she has a piglet and some chicken that she bought with the money borrowed from SIDA project. To plough the land, Ms Hoa has to rent a buffalo from her neighbour. Since she does not have money to pay the owner, she has to exchange two working days for a half day using the buffalo. This formula is similarly applied in case Ms Hoa needs to rent insecticide sprayers and rice threshers. So far, Ms Hoa has not received any financial support from the government because she does not belong to the target group for this kind of assistance.

5.3.2 Discussion

In order to determine the extent to which the agricultural changing policies (1987-1993) in Vietnam have differentially effected men and women. I refer to four

factors which contribute to this differentiation in terms of impacts of the new agricultural policies on men and women in Vietnam. These factors are: (i) Work load, (ii) power (in the family and in the society), (iii) income and (iv) benefits.

Work load

It is widely recognized by all those interviewed (from the central to the local level) that within the household economy women's work load has greatly increased compared to men. On the basis of my study, I have determined that women in the commune work longer hour and more intensively than men. Every day, on average, women and men spend from eight to ten hours working in the fields. At home, they spend from five to six hours doing housework and non-farming activities while men spend only one to two hours helping women with housework. Like men, women work as agricultural planners, managers, food and cash crop producers, processors and sellers. In addition, they are primarily involved in handicraft making, gardening, small trading, chicken, pig and cattle keeping. All men and women interviewed in the commune gave similar answers to the following questions:

Questions	Answers
(Questions addressed to husband and wife)	
- Who does the farming ?	Both
- Who does the heavy transport?	The husband does the most

- Who does the cooking for the family? The wife
- Who feeds the animal? The wife does the most
- Who collects fire wood? The wife does the most
- Who takes care of the children? The wife
- Who picks tea leaves? The wife
- Who goes shopping for the family? The wife
- Who sells farm products The wife

In the group meeting with the participation of 32 women in the commune, the same answer was given to most questions. For example, to the question: "in the family, who does the most, the husband or wife, production and housework?," the answer invariably is: "the wife does the most".

Traditionally, Vietnamese women's work load was already heavier than that done by their men. Now this burden is much heavier. This observation supports many previous feminist researchers namely Prof Le Thi, Mrs Hoang Thi Lich, deputy director of the Centre for women's studies who argued that the introduction of commodity production in Vietnam in 1987 has made women work even much harder than men. Apart from productive work, they do many non-farm activities and they take care of almost all housework. This is also consistent with the GAD perspective employed in this study.

Power

Under agricultural collectivization, although remaining a minority in administrative and cooperative management, the number of male leaders in the Trung Mon commune is still higher than in the household economy. As reported by the head of Trung Mon women's union, in the previous system, women accounted for 40% of commune administrative and cooperative management board. Today they represent only 15% of the commune administrative and economic management. Their former positions are now mainly taken over by militarily demobilized men. Therefore, the number of women as leaders has been significantly reduced, thus making women's representation in political, economic management positions in the commune sharply decreased. It is the reason why women's power in the community slipping back.

It might be expected that when women make greater economic contribution to family income, they would have more power in family matters. However, it is not the cases in all cases. When the question "In the family who makes decisions on important issues and expenses?" was addressed to men and women in the commune, eighty per cent of people interviewed answered that husband and wife discuss together and share decisions. However, when I asked the question "Does the husband or the wife have the final say in the discussion?" ninety five percent of women said that husbands do. The explanation is that men are heads of the households; so they

have more power than other members. During the war time, when almost all men were on the military front, women use to make all decisions by themselves during wartime. Today, every thing has changed when their husbands have come back and become heads of the households. As a result, they have lost this decision-making position.

Ninety percent of women interviewed from three income-groups said they keep the family's purse. However, it does not mean that they have more power than men in controlling money. There are, usually two types of expenses in a peasant family: the every day expenses on food and the large and important expenses related to furniture, means of transportation, building and repairing houses etc. In almost all interviewed cases, people said that the former is women's responsibility and the latter is the job of men. It means that women have less power in controlling money than men because women can only control small expenses on daily food while men have more power in spending large amount of money on important items.

It is increasingly clear that many women now are busy with work and are isolated in the home. Therefore, they have fewer chances to socialize and to improve themselves through information network and technical training. Consequently, women have been bypassed by updated technical, cultural and social information. In playing the role of heads of households and automatically men give themselves the right to represent the family's members in public forums. So, they

have more opportunities to participate in different social, economic and cultural activities and technical training courses. The case study indicates that in general men have higher education. Therefore, it is easier for them to absorb new technologies, and acquire higher social knowledge. Consequently, they have more power in decisions making in the family.

Income

In terms of income from paid work, it might be expected that as women share the same amount of farming work with their husbands, they should receive the same income from agricultural activities. In addition, most of the family's income from animal husbandry and non-agricultural activities is women's contribution because they do most of the work. If one looks at the total income from a peasant household in Trung Mon commune, one can see that in general income from farming production including paddy and other food crops cultivation takes up from 40% to 50% of the family's total income¹²⁷. The other part comes from animal husbandry and non-farm activities which are mostly or completely done by women. Since housework is unpaid and invisible, it is impossible to estimate how much a woman gets from her five to

¹²⁷ This proportion varies from household to household. Those who keep more cattle, pig, chicken or do more trading or handicraft activities, their income from farming may take up only 30 percent of total income.

six hours doing domestic chores and how much a man gets from his one to two hours helping his wife with housework. However, it can be confirmed that in general women spend longer hours doing domestic work and they are more qualified in this unpaid job than their men. Therefore, their income if fairly paid should be higher than that of their men. So, on the whole, women's economic contribution to the household's income is higher than that of men. This observation is found in all households in the three different income-groups. It confirms the same conclusion of a number of previous researchers. For example, the result of a study investigated one hundred households in Hai Hau District, Nam Ha province in Vietnam by Professor Le Thi in 1992 showed that¹²⁸:" In general, the wife contributes more to family income than the husband. This is in connection with the fact that the wife is responsible for most activities in agricultural production, animal husbandry, food processing, as well as child-care, cooking, care for all members of the family..."

Benefits

The findings in the beginning of this section indicated that the agricultural reforms in Vietnam has brought about many positive impacts on Vietnamese farmers especially in terms of income and living standard. However, the main

¹²⁸ Le Thi. The Development of Household Economy in Ha Vietnam and the Life of Rural Women. Ha Noi: the Centre for Women studies, 1990.

question needs to be answered, namely "who benefits the most, men or women, from the outcome of the agricultural reforms?". This question brings us back to the earlier discussion about the impacts of the agricultural reforms on rural women that the new agricultural policies which brought positive impacts on peasant households might bring greater negative impacts on women than men. For example, the policy on land allocation to peasant households based on the number of labourers and members of households has effected negatively women: first, women living without a husband have less active labourers than male headed households. Therefore, according to the land allocation policy, the amount of farm land allocated to female headed households is smaller than two parent- households. Second, in our culture, after marriage, a woman has to move into her husband's house. In a such case, a rural woman gets married to a young man in another village, she moves to her husband's place but she can not take the amount of land allocated by the cooperative to her in the new place. So, she becomes a landless woman in her husband's family. In this context, the family has to share their land with her. This automatically reduces the power of the young wife in the family. Worse, due to this weakness, she may be badly treated by family's members in the future.

The case study showed that the expenditures on men's needs are twice or four time that of women because apart from basic needs like food, housing and clothes, men need money to

buy cigarettes, pay for food and beer and liquor when they go outside to eat with their friends. Some men in the commune even use drugs and gamble. In contrast, all women interviewed said that apart from basic needs of food and shelter, women need just some money to buy clothes. They do not wear make up, they do not smoke, drink and eat outside. So, they spend much less on their own practical needs than men.

The degree that women and men have benefitted from the agricultural reforms can also be measured by access to agricultural and food processing mechanization and means of transportation. Since the introduction of the household economy, a great number of farming and food processing machinery and transport facilities have been purchased by peasant households. It was reported by the Vice President of the commune, Mr Nguyen Van Duc that in the commune there are 162 motorcycles, 56 small rice milling units and 85 trucks. It is unquestionable that these machineries and transport facilities are used to alleviate hard work and increase productivity. However, the question is for whom do these machines reduce hard work, for men or women?. There is evidence that 161 (out of 162 motorcycles) and a hundred percent of trucks are driven by men: and a hundred percent of rice milling machines are operated by men. It is clear that with agricultural and food processing mechanization, men have access to skilled and less heavy jobs while women still stick to manual, unskilled, unproductive and time-consuming work.

This is clearly the cause of women's longer and harder working burden.

Women are also found to be more disadvantaged than men with the cut back by government funding of health care and education. In general, women have more problems with health than men because they have to bear children and practise family planning measures. Their heavier work burden in the new production system is also the cause for the deterioration of their health. As mentioned earlier, limited access to health care due to the introduction of fees for medical check-ups and the increased price of medicine have seriously affected women's health. According to Mrs Tran Thi Hien, president of Thai Binh Provincial Women Union, recently new born-babies have less weight when they are delivered. This indicates that women's health has deteriorated. Finally, it has also been observed that in the household economy women have much less time than men for leisure.

The earlier discussion in this chapter indicated that the agricultural changing policies (1987-1993) in Vietnam has significantly promoted the development of Vietnam's agriculture and improved economic conditions of many women. Unfortunately, it is also clear that it has effected men and women differentially. However, it must be underlined that the new agricultural policies are not solely responsible for this differentiation because gender inequalities in this aspect are also caused by culture. The economic changes, however,

provide a concept for the reemergence of male-dominant attitudes in society and in every peasant household. This case study indicates that gender inequalities in many spheres of life are even rooted in women's outmoded way of thinking. In many interviews with women, I heard that women don't like men to help with housework. Many rural women still think that housework is women's work and men are heads of the household. Therefore men are expected by their wives to take care of important things in the family such as food production, house building, marriage of children ... rather than doing tiny things like cooking, cloths washing or baby care. It is clear that negative effects of agricultural changing policies are not only interlinked with new agricultural policies themselves and the current development strategies, but are found by this study strongly influenced by socio-cultural biases which are deeply rooted in the way both men and women think.

Based on the findings and discussion in this chapter, the following chapter will proceed to some general conclusions and provide recommendations for more appropriate agricultural development policies for rural women in next agricultural changing precess in Vietnam.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

In the last five chapters, we have dealt with various issues concerning the question of rural women in developing countries in general and the status of rural women in Vietnam in particular. Our discussion has centred on the impacts of the agricultural changing policies (1987-1993) on rural women in the North of Vietnam. This chapter is devoted to conclusions arising from this study. It proposes some recommendations for improvement of existing policies which are expected to be beneficial to rural women in the continually changing agricultural process. The following conclusions are basically answers to the questions addressed in the first chapter of this study.

6. Conclusion

First, it is acknowledged that since the introduction of the new agricultural policies in the agricultural production system in Vietnam, women's economic conditions in general have significantly improved. However, it must be clearly pointed out that this conclusion is only true for women belonging to the better-off and middle-income groups which have abundant farming land, labour, capital and technical knowledge. Women

of the low-income group, particularly women heads of households and those having many children are not classified in this category. In almost all cases, their economic conditions are getting worse.

Second, despite the fact that the household economy having improved economic conditions of the majority of rural women, it is clear that better economic conditions have not necessarily guaranteed a higher position for women in the family and in the society. It is true that with higher economic income, some women in the better-off group have more respect from family members. However, it does not mean that these women and other women have raised their position in the family in relation to men. As pointed out earlier even though women's income in general has increased, they are not in the position to have the last say in the family's important decisions and they are not considered to be heads of households but their husbands.

It is widely recognized that the land allocation to peasant households implemented in 1988 in Vietnam provided for equality between the sexes as well as equal right in land use in the family. However, it has placed young woman who has got married to man in other villages after 1988 in a disadvantageous position in her new family because when she arrived at her husband's family household, the land allocation programme was already completed. There is no land for a newcomer like her, so she becomes a landless woman and the

family has to give a piece of their land to her. For this reason, she may be not treated as an equal partner in her husband's family.

Third, in terms of work load, the conclusion can be made without any hesitation that with the new agricultural policies, all women from three income-groups work longer hours and more intensively. Now, all women have been found working very hard in seeking more agricultural and non-agricultural work for themselves in order to increase economic income for the family. The reasons which make women's actual workload heavier and their working day longer are first, women's work is mainly done by hand and within a small units of household production, women have to share heavy and risky farming work with men or even do it by themselves in the case of female headed households and second while women's productive work load has increased their reproductive work remains the same.

Fourth, regarding the effect of the agricultural reforms on women living without husbands, it can be concluded that the recent agricultural reform process has negatively affected these women in the following ways; it takes away their opportunities to get financial support from the cooperative and the community. Single parent households have more difficulties than two parent households due to less male labourers in the family, less farming land and less capital. Female heads of household with children out of lawful wedlock

have been found to be the most disadvantaged groups in the agricultural changing process.

The case study has clearly indicated that with the household economy, a powerful gender stratification system has reemerged in the North of Vietnam. It is reflected in the increase in the women's work load, the significant decline in the position of many women in the family and in the rural society. The problems experienced women living without husbands, especially women having children out of lawful wedlock were greater than in the collective system and finally, the failure of improved position of even those who significantly increased their economic conditions. However, it should be noted that these problem are traced on the one hand by some inappropriate agricultural policies of the current household production system and on the other hand by the reemergence of the male-dominant attitude in the rural society which have placed many women back in a much lower position they had achieved after the revolution and during the collective system when the country was at war with the U.S.A.

6.0 Recommendation

The recommendations I am going to propose are divided into two categories: the first are macro-oriented policies and the second are micro-oriented policies. Both are addressed to

national and local policy makers and researchers on issues that affect rural women in the whole country.

6.1 Recommendations addressed to the central management level

Gender awareness framework

Rural women's issues should be viewed as an important part of the overall agricultural development strategies and should be given priority in all agricultural and rural development programmes and projects. Due to the lack of gender awareness, many agricultural development policies, projects and programmes have failed to bring real benefits to women. Therefore, a gender awareness framework for national policy makers, researchers and practitioners is a very important factor making development projects beneficial to women. It is expected that if the former understand the constraints experienced by women in development, agricultural development policies and projects designed by them would be more gender sensitive.

Bureau for the development of rural women

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry should establish a bureau for the development of rural women within the Ministry. This bureau may have the following objectives:

- To promote women's active participation in economic development process in rural areas by various types of farm and non-farm activities.
- To work closely with the agricultural extension department and various research institutes of the Ministry to make sure that women have access to new technologies introduced into agricultural production and food processing sectors through agricultural extension programmes that will be appropriate to women and bring positive impacts in economic and social terms on them.
- To find financial resources such as a revolving fund, credit, grants, technical assistance to help women, especially poor women to have opportunities chance to increase their income and build confidence through the development process.

More research on rural women

More research that assesses the short-term and long-term economic and social gains and losses that have been made by women in relation to men through recent agricultural and rural development policies should be done to examine to what extent these policies have affected differentially men and women. At the same time, analysis of economic, social and cultural factors which prevent women from having the same benefits of the recent agricultural policies is also called for. In this

way, negative impacts of new policies on women can be limited and a more equitable development strategy for both men and women can be attained.

Support programs for poor women

To limit the gap between rich women and poor women in rural areas, the government should establish a special fund which provides financial support, credit with low interest or loan without interest to poor women for satisfying their basic needs such as access to food, clean water, housing, basic education and health care. Special attention should be paid to poor women as heads of households, in particular those who have children out of lawful wedlock, to help them to build confidence and the ability to overcome poverty and problems.

Access to information and education

Women interviewed at the commune recommend the provision free of charge of a monthly magazine for rural women which will be disseminated every month to women unions in all villages in the country. The magazine is expected to be not only a useful source of new agricultural technologies but also a good way of helping women to become aware of gender inequalities and unite them in the cause of fighting against cultural barriers and male-dominant attitudes in the family and in the society. In addition, a commune broadcasting

programme in service of rural women is also strongly recommended by female interviewees.

In order to ensure that poor women have the opportunities to go to school, the government should initiate a special fund to cover all kinds of payment required by school such as tuition fee, money for uniforms, money for repairing classrooms and purchasing furniture for girls from poor families who cannot afford to pay their children's education. Formal and non-formal educational programme should be initiated in rural areas to open more educational opportunities for women and to provide them with more appropriate skill training programme.

In terms of training, new and appropriate technologies in agricultural and food processing should be directly offered to women. The training courses should be held right at the village in order to encourage all women, including those who have small children, to participate. More training courses for women in basic management, accounting and utilization of fertilizer and insecticide should be largely organized. Training courses on family planning should be addressed to wives, husbands and their parents-in-law in order to bring awareness to all people in the family who are directly or indirectly related to the issue of birth control. Preventative measures which have a negative affect on women's health should be limited.

Credits for women

Credit for rural women should be longer-term (from one to two year), larger-size and at lower interest rate, which is more secure and allows women to invest in more profitable sectors. This type of credit is believed by many women in the commune that it does not only bring more real benefits for the family but also more secure for women and designed to improve women's health because with more money and longer payment term. Women can invest in chicken and pigs at the same time. The money she earns from short-term investment on chicken is used to pay gradually the loan. In addition, she still have chicken meat and egg to eat from time to time. If she has money only for raising pigs, she has to wait from six to seven months. When she sells pigs, her husband may use money to buy bicycle or motorcycle for himself. In this case, the woman gets no benefits from her hard work.

More transport facilities should be given to provincial and district women union in order to help the latter to monitor women's credit projects at the local level. In addition, more financial incentives should be given to women in the project's management units at the commune level who have to spend a lot of time and energy on assisting the conduction of a survey on women income, formulating women's credit groups, delivering loans to every group, providing technical guidance in the utilisation of credit and collection of repayment from borrowers. Finally, a women development

bank should be established at the central and local levels to provide credit and banking services to women.

6.1.1 Recommendations addressed to the local management level

The issue of land

Land certificates should be signed by both husband and wife as heads of households. This will not only diminish the tendency of male control of land but also guarantee that rural women have the same rights as their men regarding all purposes of land utilization: the cultivation, collateral evidence with the bank, heritage transfer and other legal and legislative matters that concern land. The intervention of local government in redistributing land in peasant extended families where a young woman moves in after she gets married to the son of the family is strongly requested and should be done in proper legal terms. In this way, she feels more secure in starting a new life with her own piece of land officially given to her by her husband's family with official recognition of the local government.

Women's participation in local management positions

Priority should be given to the election of female candidates in various management positions at the local level. This will help to enhance women's position in the society and

women's participation in political, social and economic decisions in the community's affairs.

Women and non-farm activities

Experiences in many localities in Vietnam have indicated that market arrangements are a major problem for ensuring a good return from side-line occupation for rural women, who in general lack knowledge of marketing, accounting, quality control and business transactions. The formation of women's market arrangement groups at the commune and village level is very important. It plays a central part in the success of projects on women's income generating. Women's market's arrangement groups will help women producers to get a higher price for their products by not selling products through intermediaries at low prices, through direct contacts with end-consumers.

Social welfare

Apart from the government budget to subsidize partly health care and education costs for poor women, every commune should establish a communal social welfare fund to be used to cover expenses of child care, including creches and kindergartens for all women and to contribute a part to the cost of medical check-ups and medicine for poor women. The Commune's People Committee is also requested to set up volunteer groups which offer poor women, especially women

without husbands, with labour and technical expertise, and in particular labour for heavy and risky work.

It is expected that the above recommendations will be taken into serious consideration by agricultural policy makers, projects designers, researchers and government officers in Vietnam for the improvement of existing agricultural renovation policies which are clearly shown in this research to have exerted various negative impacts on rural women in Vietnam.

It must be aware that gender equity is an important factor to facilitate economic development. When problems which are faced by rural women during the agricultural changing process (1987-1993) have been exposed, greater attention should be given by government policy makers in Vietnam in order to ensure balance in the relation between agricultural development and gender equity.

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR A FIELD RESEARCH IN VIETNAM

(APRIL 18 TO AUGUST 6, 1994)

*** * ***

I. Questions for individual interviews with policy makers and researchers at the central level

- The agricultural collectivization (1960-1987) in the North of Vietnam; its content, implementation, social and economic performance, negative and positive impacts on farmers especially rural women, reasons for its failure.
- The agricultural reforms (197-1993) in Vietnam; its content, implementation, social and economic performance, positive and negative impacts on farmers, especially on rural women, suggestions for its improvement for women development issues.
- The overall economic reform (1987-1993) in Vietnam; its content, implementation, performance, suggestions for further policy improvements.

2. Questions for individual interviews with leaders of Tuyen Quang province, Yen Son District and Trung Mon commune

- The implementation of agricultural collectivization (1956-1987) in Tuyen quang province, Yen son district and Trung Mon commune
- The implementation of agricultural reforms (1987- 1993)
- Social and economic advantages and disadvantages of both agricultural production systems
- General social and economic indicators in terms of arable land, population, culture, health, education, female headed households and agricultural production activities (crop production and animal husbandry) of Trung Mon commune at present time
- The role of women union in helping women with credits for women, income generating activities, technology transfer, marketing, family planning ...
- Positive and negative impacts of the household economy on rural women
- Suggestions for further policy improvements facilitating women to be developed.
- Who are worse-off under the new agricultural management system and why?
- What is the proportion of better-off and worse-off households in the commune at present?

- What do poor families expect from the government's support?
- What is the negative effect of the abolition of state

3. Questions for open-ended individual interviews with selected households in Trung Mon commune

3.0 Questions for men and women of two-parent households Before and after the agricultural reform (1987-1993)

Power and decision making in the family:

(the following questions will be addressed to both wife and husband in separated interviews)

- Who decides on expenditure on the family's daily food?
- Who makes final decisions on important matters such as building or buying a house, investing in family production, children's education and marriage...?
- What is the proportion of women in the management board of cooperative, commune people's council, people's committee and farmer's association?
- Supposing one of their children has to drop out school early due to financial difficulty, will this child be your son or daughter and why?

- who attends a training course on agricultural technology, a training course on family planning?
- Who holds the family's purse?
- Who bears the name of the family head in land certificate with the government?

Productive work: (per day in average):

Under collective system:

- How many hours did men and women spend on collective farming work ?
- How many work points did men and women get per one working day?
- What kind of collective farm work did the cooperative give to men and women?

Under the household economy system:

- How many hours do men and women spend on household productive work?
- What kinds of farm work are done by men and women?
- Who takes care of animal (including feed preparation and raising)?
- Who does home gardening work?
- Who sells farm products?

Reproductive work: (per day in average):

- How many hours do women spent on domestic work?
- How many hours do men help women with housework?
- How many hours do men and women spend for leisure?
- How many hours do men and women sleep?
- Who takes care of children?
- who goes shopping for the family's daily food?
- Who prepares the meals for the whole family?
- Who collects fire wood?
- Who does clothes washing?
- Who cleans the house?

Income and expenses:

- Whose income is higher (including extra-income from side-line occupations?)
- What kinds of investments has the household made on agricultural production and food processing?
- How much money did a family spend on
 - * family's daily food?
 - * Children's education?
 - * Furniture?
 - * Medical services and medicine?
 - * wife's practical needs?
 - * Husband's practical needs?
 - * Other expenses?

Other related questions:

- Household members
- Relationship between household members
- Age of household members
- Education of household members
- Do they live with their parents ? if yes, do their parents help them with farm work or domestic work?
- On average, how many hours do women spend on social and cultural activities?
- In case of divorce, do women have a part of family's farm land?

4. Some additional questions for single mothers from female headed households

Apart from the above questions, some following additional questions are specially addressed to women as heads of households:

Under the collective system:

- Has she received financial help from the government or cooperatives? if yes, how much did she receive per month?
- If she could not fulfil the number of work points assigned by the cooperative, was her family's income

distributed by the cooperative lower compared to other families?

- Is there any favoured policies regarding her children's education?

Under the agricultural reforms (1987-1993):

- How much land does she have? Does she receive any favour from the local government regarding farm land allocation?
- Has she got draught animals? If not, does she have to hire draught cattle from other family?
- Do the commune people's committee or any other institution help her with her farm works, especially in terms of labour ?
- Does she have to do heavy and heavy work such as insecticide spray or heavy transport?
- Does she have to hire labour? if yes, how much money she has to pay them per one working day?
- Has any of her children had to drop out of school early?
- Does she receive any support from the local women's Union?
- What kind of support does she request from the central and local governments?

5. Questions for group discussion

Under the household economy:

- Who does the most, the husband or the wife, production and housework in the family?
- Whose income is higher, the husband's or the wife's ?
- Who benefits more from the family income ?
- Who has more power in the family important matters?

APPENDIX II

LIST OF INTERVIEWED PEOPLE AT THE CENTRAL LEVEL

- 1 - Mr Nguyen Cong Tan, Minister, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industry (MAFI)
- 2 - Mr Ngo The Dan, Vice - Minister, MAFI
- 3 - Mr Nguyen Van Tiem, Director, Agricultural Economic Research Institute, MAFI
- 4 - Mr Vu Xuan Dan, Vice Director, Agricultural Policy Department, MAFI
- 5 - Mrs Cao Thi Hao, Women study's section, Agricultural Policy Department, MIFF
- 6 - Mr Huynh Xuan Hoang, Director, Agricultural Planning Department, MIFF
- 7 - Mr Nguyen Xuan Truong, expert, Agricultural Planning Department, MIFF
- 8 - Mr Tran An Phong, Director, Land use and planning Department, MIFF
- 9 - Mr Bui Quang Toan, Deputy-Director
- 10 - Mr Nguyen Ich Chuong, Deputy-Director, International Cooperation Department, MIFF
- 11 - Mrs Hoang Thi Lich, Deputy Director, The Centre for Women studies
- 12 - Mrs Tran Thi Hien, president, Thai Binh Provincial Women Union

13 - Mrs Nguyen Thi Bich Lien, Deputy-Director, personnel
Department, MIFF

14 - Mrs Bui Thi Vuong, expert, Vietnam Women Union

APPENDIX III

LIST OF INTERVIEWED PEOPLE AT THE PROVINCIAL LEVEL

- 1 - Mr Nguyen Trung Nhat, President of Tuyen Quang People
Committee
- 2 - Mrs Ha Thi Khiet, President of Tuyen Quang People's
Council
- 3 - Mrs Dao Thi Huyen, Director, Service of Invalid and
Social Affaire of Tuyen Quang province
- 4 - Mr Dao Van Khang, former President of Yen Son District
- 5 - Nguyen Thi Oanh, President, Tuyen Quang Women Union
- 6 - Nguyen Thi Nga, expert, Tuyen Quang Women Union
- 7 - Vu Thi Thom, expert, Tuyen Quang Women Union
- 8 - Tran Van Hoa, Project Management Unit funded by the
International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

APPENDIX IV

LIST OF THE INTERVIEWED PEOPLE FROM TWELVE SELECTED HOUSEHOLDS IN TRUNG MON COMMUNE, YEN SON DISTRICT, TUYEN QUANG PROVINCE

I / Better-off group

- Ms Pham Thi Kiem (female headed household)
- Mrs Nguyen Thi Nhiep
- Mr Nguyen Van Hien
- Mrs Nguyen Thi Hong
- Mr Vu Van Dui
- Mrs Vu Thi Huong
- Mr Tran Van Son

II - Middle-income group

- Ms Nguyen Thi Tuy (female headed household)
- Mrs Mai Thi Chien
- Mr Trinh Van Cuong
- Mrs Duong Thi Bau
- Mr Phung Gia Chieu
- Mrs Pham Thi Tinh
- Mr Luong Van Chien

III- Low-income group

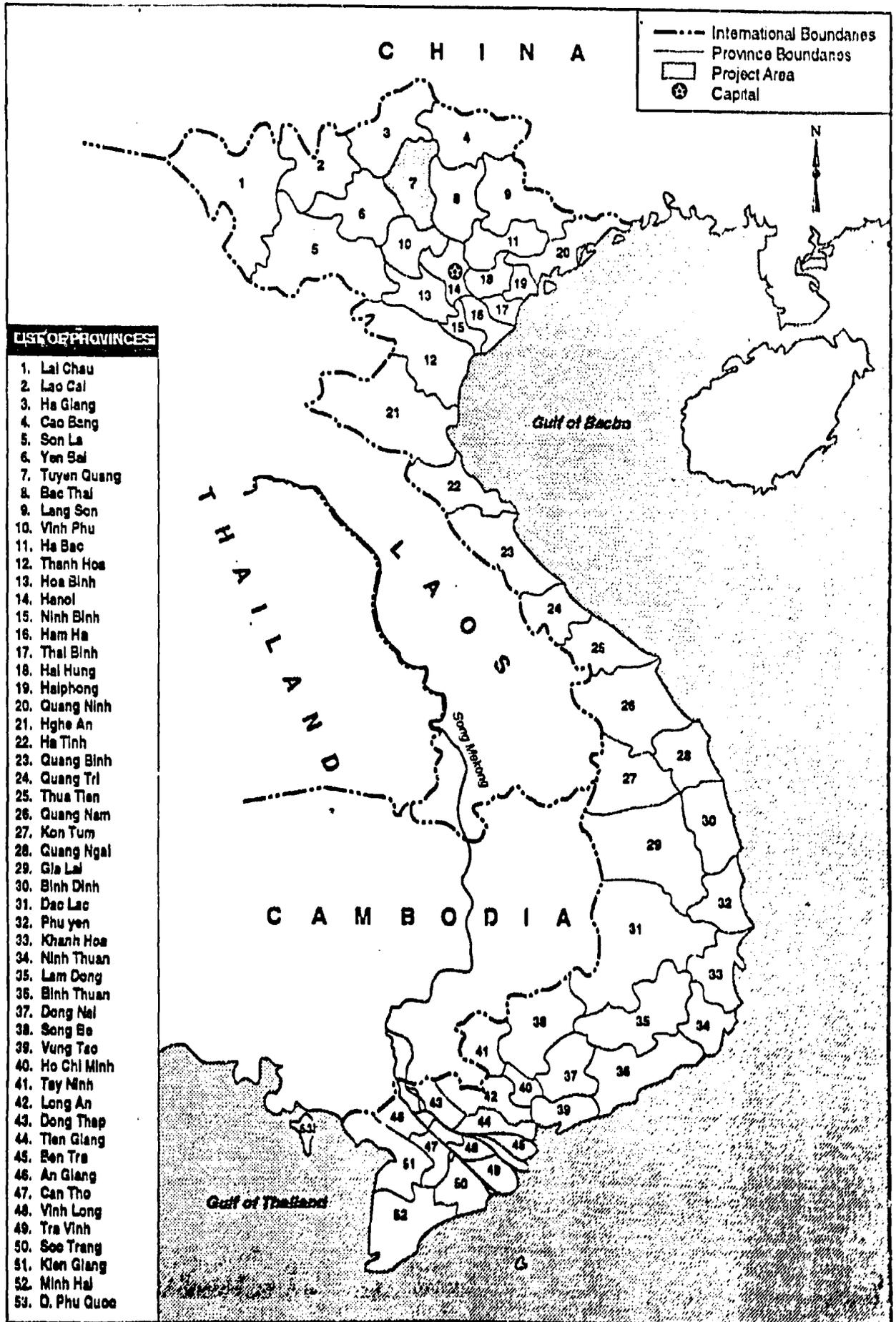
- Ms Dinh Thi Hoa (female headed household)
- Mrs Dinh Thi Sen
- Mr Nguyen Van Tuan
- Mrs Dinh Thi Chien
- Mr Nguyen Van Toan
- Mrs Do Thi Phu
- Mr Dinh Quoc Viet

INTERVIEWED LEADERS OF THE COMMUNE PEOPLE'S COMMITTEE AND COMMUNE WOMEN UNION

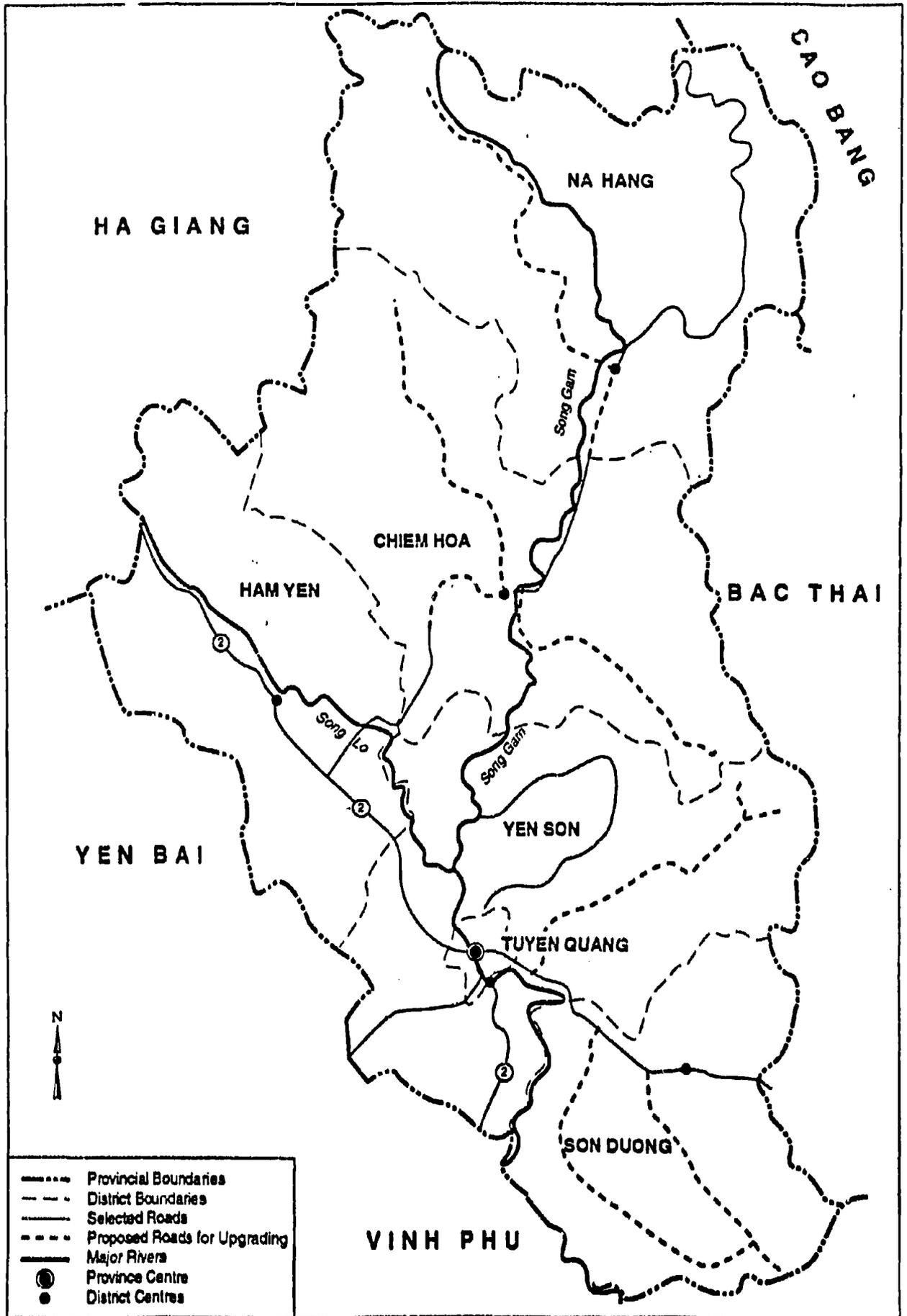
- Mr Nguyen Van Duc, Vice president (Commune People
Committee)
- Mrs Nguyen Thi Hoa, Head (Commune Women Union)
- Mrs Dao Thi Nhan, Deputy-head
- Mrs Nguyen Thi Nhiep, Deputy-head

APPENDIX V - MAPS

MAP 1 - ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES OF VIETNAM



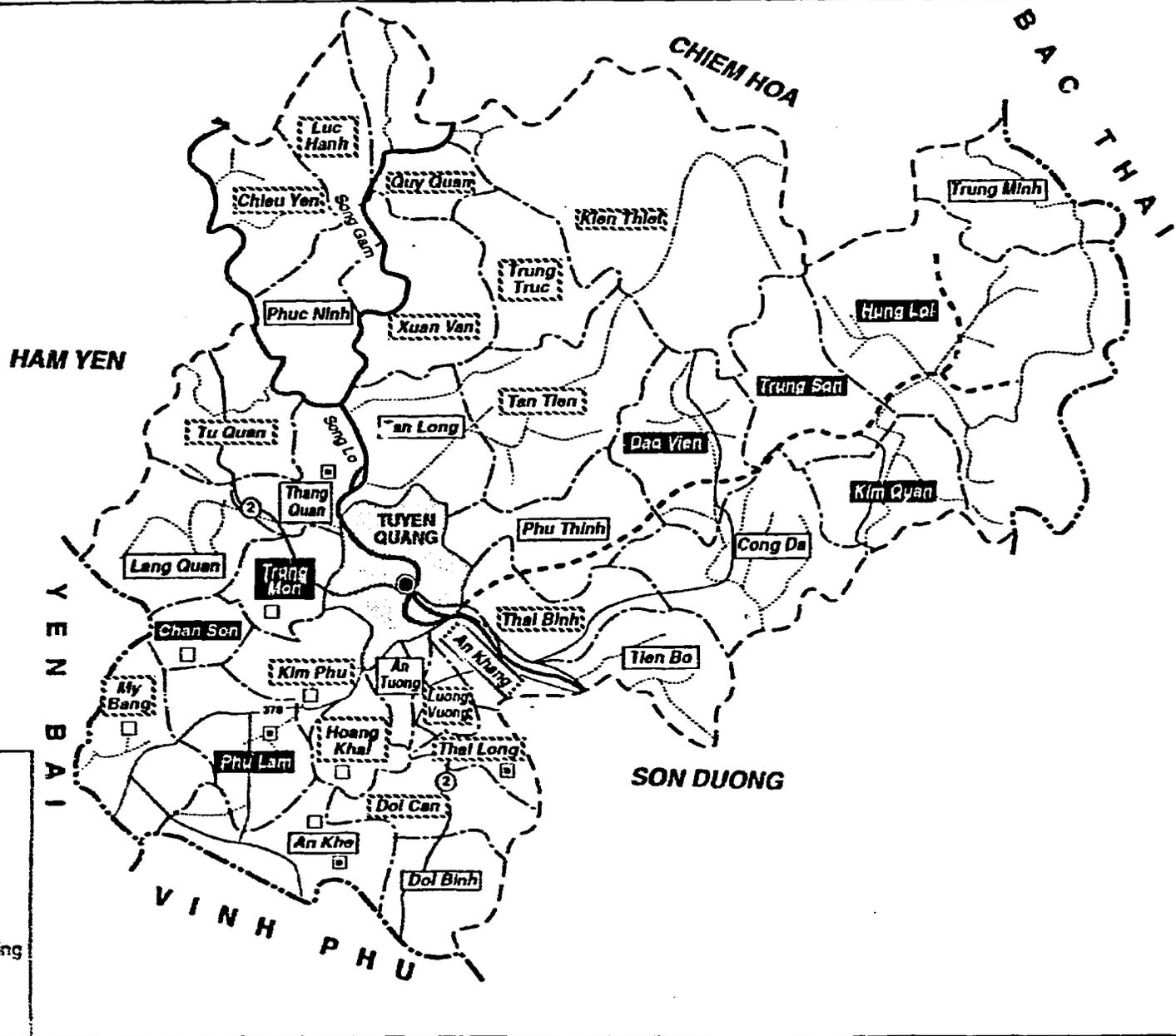
MAP 2 - TUYEN QUANG PROVINCE



PRIORITY RANKING OF COMMUNES

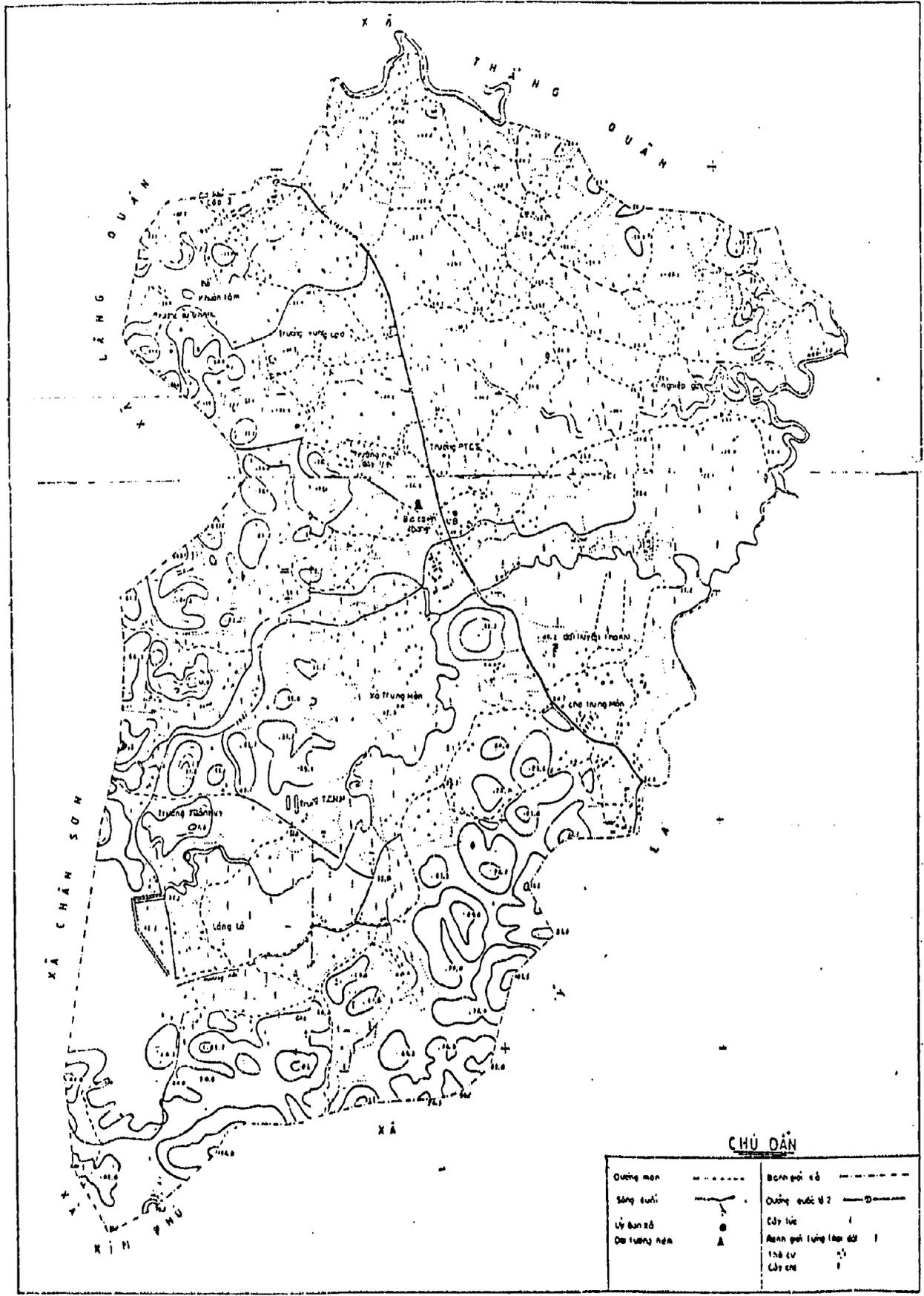
- Tam Da Inclusion in Years 1-2
- Tam Da Inclusion in Years 3-4
- Tam Da Inclusion in Years 5-6

- Rehabilitation Scheme
- New Irrigation Scheme
- Provincial Boundaries
- District Boundaries
- Commune Boundaries
- Highway
- Main Road
- Tracks
- Proposed Roads for Upgrading
- Major Rivers
- Minor Rivers
- District Centres



MAP 3 - YEN SONG DISTRICT

MAP 4 - TRUNG MON COMMUNE, YEN SON DISTRICT



CHU DAN

Đường mòn	-----	Đường quốc lộ	-----
Sông suối	~~~~~	Đường quốc lộ 2	-----
Lý Ban xã	●	Cây tiêu	⌢
Đa Truong Hien	▲	Biển giữ lương thực	⌢
		Nhà cũ	⌢
		Cây cau	⌢

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