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**Rethinking Development, Environment and Women in Viet Nam:  
Building A Feminist Sustainable Development Framework**

**Nadia Stuewer**

**October 1996**

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis, grounded in feminist research and analysis, develops an alternative to the orthodox model of economic development. Three interconnected strands form the core of the thesis: economic development, ecologically sustainable development, and women.

The thesis describes the ways in which Viet Nam's economic reform impacts on women and the environment. Analysis of Vietnamese policy documents on these themes within the framework of the UN World Commission on Environment and Development (Brundtland Commission) reveals fundamental flaws in both the framework and Vietnamese policies: women are marginalized, and the nature of growth is misunderstood.

Using theoretical literature on these themes, a holistic and transformative framework based on equality and non-exploitation is developed and applied to three specific aspects of Vietnamese society: education, growth, and labour. Alternative directions are suggested for Vietnamese policy-makers. Applying this feminist sustainable development framework will also solve the pressing problems of poverty and population.

I wish to dedicate this thesis to the women of Viet Nam, with hopes for a green, just, and peaceful future.

### Woman Work

I've got the children to tend  
The clothes to mend  
The floor to mop  
The food to shop  
Then the chicken to fry  
Then baby to dry  
I got company to feed  
The garden to weed  
I've got the shirts to press  
The tots to dress  
The cane to be cut  
I gotta clean up this hut  
Then see about the sick  
And the cotton to pick

Shine on me, sunshine  
Rain on me, rain  
Fall softly, dewdrops  
And cool my brow again.

Storm, blow me from here  
With your fiercest wind  
Let me float across the sky  
'Til I can rest again.

Fall gently, snowflakes  
Cover me with white  
Cold icy kisses  
Let me rest tonight.

Sun, rain, curving sky  
Mountain, oceans, leaf and stone  
Star shine, moon glow  
You're all that I can call my own

-Maya Angelou

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In the spirit of giving credit where credit is due, I also want to recognize the many trees that were sacrificed for the many drafts this thesis went through.

## GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABD	Asian Development Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DAWN	Development Alternatives and Women for a New Era
FLS	Forward Looking Strategies
GAD	Gender And Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIC	Newly Industrialized Country
NPESD	National Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
ROW	Report on Women
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SID	Society for International Development
SIDA	Swedish International Development Authority
SPC	State Planning Committee
UN	United Nations
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Economic Social and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Childrens Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAD	Women And Development
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WED	Women, Environment and Development
WID	Women In Development
WSSD	World Summit on Social Development
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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**CHAPTER 1**  
**INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Background and Rationale**

**1.1.1 Viet Nam's *Doi Moi***

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam<sup>1</sup>, a small country in the Indochina peninsula, is at a turning point. It is in the midst of a transition from a centrally planned socialist system to a free market economy. This transition is known as "*doi moi*" or "economic renovation" in Viet Nam. The resulting changes have the potential for "harm" as well as "good" for the people of Viet Nam. The potential for negative impacts is particularly high for the natural and social environments and the lives of women.

---

<sup>1</sup> I write "Viet Nam" as it is written in Vietnamese (without the accent and tonal marks). Most North Americans and some Vietnamese writing in English use the anglicized form of "Vietnam," but I use that only in direct quotations.

Viet Nam has the opportunity to learn from the mistakes of other countries which have followed the path of industrialization and the market. But how is this learning taking place? What questions are even being asked? With Western "experts" from the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on one hand, and Western business people and multinationals on the other providing advice for the transition, the danger exists that Viet Nam's development will be unbalanced and unsustainable. It is likely that the right questions will not be asked, questions such as: How will women be affected by capitalist development? What will be the environmental consequences of following a market economy? How environmentally sustainable is a market economy? What are the dangers? What are the connections between sustainable development and women's issues?

The Asian countries of South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong are often called newly-industrialized (or industrializing) countries (NICs) or the Asian Tigers because of the rapid industrialization they have undergone. They are held forth as role models for other "emerging markets" to follow (Devlin and Yap 1994; Bello and Rosenfeld 1990). Viet Nam is sometimes called the "fifth Tiger" (Doyle 1994; Ching 1994) and considered to be the next Asian NIC, along with Thailand. A closer examination of the NICs reveals that the

lessons to be learned from their experiences may be not to follow in their footsteps, but to choose an alternate path.

### 1.1.2 The Story of the NICs

Many economists and development experts consider the NICs to be models of successful economic growth. They view key ingredients in the formula to success to be export-oriented production, cheap labour, an undervalued currency, free markets, and a minimum of state intervention. This orthodox success formula for development<sup>2</sup> in the late twentieth century is based on economic development theories from the 1950s, drawing on neo-classical economics and W.W. Rostow's stages of growth theory, but it is no longer valid, if it ever truly was.

The IMF and World Bank have misinterpreted the factors responsible for the NICs' success and now incorporate these inappropriate prescriptions into their structural adjustment policies (SAPs) in over 30 countries (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 343). This orthodox formula of export-oriented growth, drastic income reductions, and opening the domestic economy to foreign capital and manufactured goods from Western countries has been shown to lead to economic disaster, not economic

---

<sup>2</sup> In following section I use the word "development" in the orthodox sense of economic development/growth, unless otherwise indicated.

development. Instead, lessons that Third World<sup>3</sup> countries can learn from the NICs include the recognition of the importance of land reform to economic takeoff, and the need for effective, but not authoritarian, state involvement in development policy. In Taiwan and South Korea, the initial land redistribution eliminated the politically reactionary landlord class, freed up resources for investment, and created a market of rural consumers that became the main stimulus for the first period of growth (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 343). These changes were significant in the success of the takeoff.

In an extensive analysis of South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore, Bello and Rosenfeld (1990)<sup>4</sup> argue that the success of these countries was partly due to certain external conditions, which are not available to countries today; also, they argue that the freedom of the markets has been overestimated and the role of the state discounted in orthodox

---

<sup>3</sup> The various terminology to describe the so-called "Third World" is controversial and can be confusing. Terms such as South, underdeveloped, developing, industrializing, Third World, and their counterparts of North (or West), developed, industrialized, all have different connotations, many of them negative. Terms such as the "economic South" (more geographically accurate than "South") or Two-Thirds World (more accurate than "Third World") are appealing, but awkward. In this thesis I use "industrializing" and "South," and sometimes "developing," "and industrialized" and "West" as their counterparts. Although I realize that these words cannot be used free of the baggage they have accumulated, I would like to consider the words as simple modifiers.

<sup>4</sup> As the rest of this section relies heavily on Bello and Rosenfeld (1990), references to that work will be given as page numbers in parentheses only.

analysis. In spite of these qualifications, the orthodox analysis of the NICs has become the World Bank and IMF rule.

A number of the conditions that made these countries' entries into the international market possible do not exist for Viet Nam. Viet Nam cannot follow closely the formula of the NICs; the initial conditions, both internal and external, are not as similar as those who call Viet Nam the "fifth Tiger" might pretend.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, broad comparisons can be made, for the environmental and social problems will likely occur even if a loose formula based on rapid industrialization is followed.

Orthodox analysis also overlooks the negative results of the rapid industrialization of the NICs. Taiwan has been described as a "poisoned paradise of free-wheeling capitalism" (3), and a prominent South Korean labour leader put her country's economic miracle into perspective in saying:

The government says the economy is successful. But only a few benefit from the economy.... There is nothing in it for us [the workers]. (cited in Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 44)

Long-suppressed costs are catching up with these countries in the 1990s, especially in the areas of environment, agriculture and labour. All three countries are faced with massive environmental degradation, as a result of cultivating

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<sup>5</sup> It is ironic that the American-Vietnam War provided "vital stimulus" for South Korea's and Taiwan's economic take-off; the American demand for weapons spurred industrialization in Viet Nam's neighbours (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 5).

pollution-intensive industry and few, if any, environmental regulations. South Korea's and Taiwan's agriculture systems are on the brink of collapse. Singapore's educated elite are fleeing the authoritarian regime. Labour unions are becoming more demanding and militant in their pursuit of higher wages and safer working conditions, so capital is fleeing to areas with lower labour costs -- such as Viet Nam.

These problems are often interconnected, and are a direct result of rapid and intense industrialization imposed by authoritarian regimes. The increasingly vocal environmental movements in South Korea and Taiwan are questioning not only the worth of the development strategies of their governments, but the validity of the authoritarian state itself. They demand a fundamental reconsideration of development priorities, recognizing that economic success cannot continue to be bought at the expense of the natural environment.

#### The NICs' intensive industrialization

telescoped into three decades [the] processes of environmental destruction that took many more years to unfold in earlier industrializing societies. (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990, 12)

South Korea is experiencing contamination of all parts of its ecosystem: air, water, and land. An example of cyclical destruction is the deforestation of the highlands, which causes erratic river flows leading to drought in agricultural areas that are irrigated by these waters, as well as flooding. The flooding leads to further erosion and soil loss, increasing the silt content of rivers, which leads to more

flooding. Dams built on these rivers only increase the flooding (96). In urban areas, air pollution, acid rain, and water pollution are becoming more critical (98, 100). Taiwan suffers from similar environmental problems. Taiwan, like Viet Nam, has a population of indigenous people, making up two per cent of the population. They have been confined to mountain reserves, and their traditional ways of life are threatened by pollution, logging and road building. Tribal lands have been seized by the government for development projects (196). Singapore's environmental problems are not yet as critical as South Korea's and Taiwan's, but they are not inconsequential, and involve pollution of air, water, and land.

Although agricultural reform early in the development process led to greater equity and was instrumental in the economic takeoff for South Korea and Taiwan, subsequent policies caused the collapse of the agricultural economy in both countries. Agriculture was once these societies' most valued and essential occupation, and subsidized the first phase of economic growth, but the government soon viewed the peasantry as an obstacle to development, and biased its policy toward urban-biased, export-led growth. In South Korea, American agricultural products were imported, in a quid pro quo arrangement for access to its manufactured-products markets, and Korean farmers suffered. Green revolution technologies also came with their price. The intensive use of

fertilizers and pesticides to grow high-yield varieties of rice is causing health problems, decreased soil fertility (demanding ever-increasing fertilizer inputs) and groundwater contamination (96).

The environmental and agricultural problems of Taiwan and South Korea are severe, and will continue to deteriorate, even if solutions are implemented immediately. However, in the short term, the labour situation is even more serious. The NICs have become a model for profitability by their organization of cheap labour, long working hours, and dangerous working conditions into an efficient system (24). The management style is militaristic; unions are all but illegal. Force and repression are necessary to maintain this system. Inequalities in income distribution are growing, along with resentment and discontent among the lower classes.

Women have suffered most from labour exploitation. They are at the bottom of the hierarchy; they get paid less than men, and often have less job security, do more labour-intensive work, and work less in supervisory positions than men (26). In South Korea, women earn 50 per cent of men's wages (25); in Taiwan, 62 per cent (216) and in Singapore 73 per cent (301). In Singapore, women are "channelled primarily into areas where stereotypically feminine characteristics like beauty, willingness to serve, docility, and intellectual passivity are valued by employers" (307). Women work as an "elastic reserve army of labour" -- they can be brought out in

boom times, and fired in tighter times (308). In Taiwan, women suffer outside of the workplace as well as in it. Traditional society is not keeping up with the changing role of women. Families pressure young women to work and contribute to the family income as long as possible; thus many women do not get married because they are pressured to work beyond the prime marrying age (218). These women have no place in a society with clearly-defined family roles for women.

The role of women in economic success is recognized, although it has not been rewarded. In all three NICs, women's participation in the workforce was an essential element in their industrialization triumph.

Viet Nam can learn many lessons from the experience of the NICs, especially concerning environmental and labour issues. The foremost is that success has its darker side. Rapid industrial development can have disastrous ecological consequences. One component of ecologically sustainable development involves preventing environmental problems before they occur, by instituting and enforcing environmental regulations. The NICs' experiences also provide advice on agricultural policies, especially the importance of actively keeping a strong agricultural base and the relationship between environmental degradation and agriculture.

Another component of sustainable development is labour. Legislation to keep exploitation of labour at a minimum is

essential; not only in the interests of its citizens, but to keep Viet Nam, as a country, from being used by international capital. The experience of the NICs shows that foreign capital is only interested in a country as long as the labour costs are cheap; once they rise, capital looks for a cheaper market. This is not a basis for a sustainable economic strategy. No matter how authoritarian the regime, as the NICs have shown, exploited workers cannot be held in thrall for ever. The discontent of workers and farmers now extends beyond their poor working conditions and low wages and questions the very legitimacy of the state and its development strategy. Related to the nature of governance, a democratic system that includes equality in access to resources and ability to make decisions in the workplace, as well as voting for a representative government is also important in achieving sustainable development. Equitable income distribution is another condition for sustainable development.

The third area in which Viet Nam can learn from the experiences of the NICs concerns the role of women in the development process. Women played a critical role in the economic success of the NICs, yet their contributions were not adequately rewarded and women suffered from the process. Although women in Viet Nam enjoy more emancipation than their counterparts in the NICs, their gains in terms of equality are not guaranteed to withstand the pressures of rapid industrialization.

### 1.1.3 Purpose and Audience

The overarching purpose of this thesis is to develop an alternative to the model of economic development that the NICs offer, one that is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable and inclusive of women, and to apply it to Viet Nam. This alternative framework is grounded in feminist research and theory.

More specifically, this thesis aims to describe the ways in which Viet Nam's economic reform impacts on women and the environment; to make policy-level recommendations for sustainable development in Viet Nam; and to make policy-level recommendations on strategies for improving the status of women and the state of the environment in Viet Nam. Sustainable development, as defined by the feminist framework, will result in an improvement in the social and ecological environment in the development of the country.

Further contributions of this thesis stem from the feminist nature of the research. An academic contribution of this thesis is that it addresses both theory and policy issues in an integrated approach that does not treat them as separate spheres, one abstracted and decontextualized, the other "merely" an application of theory. Methodologically, this thesis contributes to finding a way to do feminist research for library-based analysis. Finally, this thesis aims to raise the awareness of North American readers about Viet Nam

and the Vietnamese people, to counter popular media images of the Vietnam War.

The audience of this thesis includes policy makers in Viet Nam, particularly those dealing with women's and sustainable development issues; women's and environmental agencies groups in Viet Nam, both governmental and non-governmental; international agencies working in these areas in Viet Nam; and the academic community. I hope that the questions that this thesis poses and the suggestions it makes will inspire changes in Vietnamese policy that will ultimately benefit the ordinary people of Viet Nam.

The analysis in this thesis is a first step. I hope that it will serve as a recognition of a need for further feminist research into Viet Nam's economic renovation and provide inspiration for this research.

## **1.2 Research Methodology**

### **1.2.1 Library Research**

Due to constraints of time and funding, this thesis is a library thesis. Researching the topics of women and environment in Viet Nam has not been a straightforward task. Little research on Viet Nam is available in North America. What little there is, is mostly old, or is about the "Vietnam War," or both. Recent material focuses mainly on the economic transition and its impact on the global economy. It is generally written from a neo-liberal perspective. This made

gathering information in the areas of women's and ecological issues a challenge.

In addition to using secondary material obtained from libraries, I used primary material in the form of Vietnamese government policy documents on development, sustainable development and women. Even in the policy documents, information on women and environmental themes was insufficient, however. I also did some preliminary participant-observation research in Viet Nam, which will be discussed further below.

#### 1.2.2 Feminist Research Issues

I will begin this discussion by describing feminist research, and then I will explain how this thesis draws upon principles of feminist research. Three principles of feminist research are that it is grounded in women's experience, aware of women's oppression, and oriented to change. Action, experience, interdisciplinarity, communication, integration, and self-reflection are essential components of feminist research (Douma et al. 1994).

Doing feminist research is important because not enough research includes women's perspectives. A feminist sustainable development perspective is important because it is one of the few contemporary theories to examine development, environment and women's issues in a holistically and integrated fashion while remaining faithful to the

perspectives and experiences of women. More research done from a feminist perspective is needed in development and environmental research, as "[t]here is still resistance to gender as integral to all research topics, even if at the same time the link between gender and the environment is increasingly recognized" (Douma et al, 1994, 183). Since the World Bank and other orthodox development institutions are not providing advice that is in the interests of the environment, women, and other people who are becoming disadvantaged from the economic processes that are being advocated, it becomes the role of the feminist researcher to counter the advice of these institutions and provide alternatives useful to creating changes. While feminist research from the perspective of Southern women is especially valuable and needed, Western feminist women cannot be silent in light of the powerful economic orthodoxy attempting to reassert patriarchy throughout the world.

The challenge of this thesis has been to write a feminist thesis based primarily on secondary sources, with access to some primary policy documents. This thesis is consistent with many principles of a feminist approach, and it makes a contribution to establishing a feminist way of doing library research, a topic about which little has been written within the field of feminist research methodology.

### A. Experience for Context

The first principle of feminist research is that it be grounded in experience. In 1994 I spent ten weeks in Hanoi, Viet Nam as a participant in the Atlantic Canada-Viet Nam Linkage Project.<sup>6</sup> I have grounded this thesis in my experiences there; my time in Viet Nam provided essential context for writing a thesis. Although not a source of "data," this experience gave me an understanding of the cultural context and the reality of Viet Nam. More importantly, it created a connection and provided systems of relevance that gave life to concepts -- Viet Nam, women, the environment -- which were otherwise simply abstract concepts about which I read and wrote, but could not relate to, stuck in a foggy Halifax winter. Making the analysis relevant is very difficult if one is researching and writing out of the context in which the subject is based.

### B. Awareness and Self-Reflection

The process of doing feminist research has given me greater awareness of the implications of my position as a researcher. Self-reflection by the researcher on her role in development and in society is an important part of the process of doing feminist research. This thesis is not only about earning my M.A., but also about understanding women's lives,

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<sup>6</sup> This project was administered by the International Activities Office of Saint Mary's University and funded by the Max Bell Foundation.

discovering oppressive forces and creating alternatives. To me, this self-reflection brings up many issues, the most significant among them being cultural sensitivity, the role of Westerners, and diversity.

I believe that cultural sensitivity is important when writing in development studies. It is difficult for a Western feminist graduate student to understand enough of a very different culture to write a thesis such as this. It is easy to misinterpret and misjudge, but I believe that if research such as this is pursued in the spirit of openness and learning, some cultural errors can be forgiven.

The process of writing this thesis has caused me to ponder imperialism and colonialism. Some people believe that Westerners should have no further role in development, having done quite enough damage already. There are arguments that development is a Western concept that should be abandoned; that the South should create its own models and theories from now on. While there is validity to these views, I believe that just as West is not best<sup>7</sup>, it is also not the case that West is always worst. At this stage, there clearly has been and continues to be Western involvement in "development." Not enough of this involvement has been done from a feminist

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<sup>7</sup> Last summer, I helped present an orientation program to several Vietnamese scholars at Saint Mary's University. In the discussion on the first day, one of the women commented, in response to some element of her society, that "West is best!" Her comment was treated with much laughter and agreement. I felt that I was the only person in the room to find that sentiment disturbing.

perspective, in a manner that is culturally sensitive and appropriate, humble not imperialist, and does not involve unwanted advice and imposition of values. Women throughout the world can learn from, and support each other, in their respective struggles.

I have also gained insight into the importance of recognizing diversity and interdependence. An interdisciplinary perspective and integrated research are important features of feminist sustainable development research. Interdisciplinarity is critical because overspecialization within disciplines and lack of communication between them becomes a barrier to achieving "conceptual and institutional change." This becomes particularly relevant when both the natural sciences and social sciences are involved, as they are in this thesis.

The increased integration of research that is being done in gender, development, and environment research is particularly necessary, because much of the research focuses on one element at the expense of the others. An integrated approach is necessary to "bring about the evolution of sustainable development" (Douma et al. 1994, 183). This thesis is interdisciplinary and integrative in its examination of environmental, economic and social issues, and its attempt to understand the interrelationships between them.

### C. Change

A third component of feminist research is an orientation to change. This component is often present in the form of action research;<sup>8</sup> in my thesis, based on library research, it is manifested in its orientation toward policy. The analysis that I make in Chapter Six makes suggestions for change, at both conceptual and policy levels. My intention in this thesis is to provoke thought that will lead to change.

In the next section I will elaborate on one area of my research, my participant-observation in Viet Nam.

#### 1.2.3 My Experience of Women's Issues in Viet Nam

Since feminist research draws on women's experiences, I will share the story of my experience of women's issues in Viet Nam. Although I was not explicitly researching this topic while I was there, what I saw sparked a curiosity to learn more that became my inspiration for writing this thesis.

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<sup>8</sup> "[F]eminist researchers have little choice and much responsibility to shape our research through an activist stance, in collaboration with community-based political women" (Fine 1992, 205). Feminist sustainable development research advocates an active component that is in collaboration with those persons whose reality is being studied (Maguire 1987). It should be participatory and result in action. Ideally there is an improvement of the dialogue between NGOs and academia (Douma et al. 1994, 184). Research should be grounded in reality, in the "everyday life experiences and understandings of women and men, be they poor peasants, government bureaucrats or researchers" (Long and Long in Douma et al. 1994, 180).

My impressions of women's lives in Viet Nam are mostly intuitive; the most descriptive story I have is my experience at a Gender and Development (GAD) working group meeting. This meeting is a good introduction to women's development issues in Viet Nam.

On July 20 1994, I attended a GAD Working Group meeting at the Radda Barnen (Swedish Save the Children) office in Hanoi. This group is a coalition of international NGOs working in Hanoi whose purpose is to get women's issues recognized in policy, both by the World Bank and the State Planning Committee (SPC). They do research and provide support. About half the women present were Vietnamese, half foreigners. What others called the "token male" was white, as was the facilitator, Heather Grady.

Cross-cultural communication was interesting to observe. The Vietnamese women sat together, around the edge of the room, while the foreigners sat around a square of tables in the centre. The meeting was run in a Western style, and I had the impression the Vietnamese women did not always understand the process. Aside from the distinctive spatial segregation in the room, the style was very "feminist": consensus oriented, people's opinions were always welcome. The agenda was set out at the beginning; members could add items.

People were enthusiastic and had many ideas, but not enough time and energy to carry them out; there was an underlying current of frustration and even helplessness. The

discussion went from specifics -- what issues shall we present to the World Bank -- to a general lament on poverty and oppression. All issues became interconnected and too large for any one person, NGO, working group or even State Planning Committee to deal with, without feeling overwhelmed. The list of issues to be taken to the SPC, for example, included health, education, credit and savings, training and extension, debt, land, forestry, irrigation, agriculture, the environment, and employment opportunities -- almost every aspect of women's lives. The examples that were given in the discussion gave a pretty bleak picture: so much still needs to be done, to make women equivalent with men in these areas.

The working group was planning towards the World Bank Donor's Committee meeting in Paris in November in which they were to present women's issues which they wanted the World Bank to consider in their policies. It was decided to focus on four areas: health, education, training and extension, and credit and savings. These issues are critical for women and their situation in Vietnamese society. In the area of health, services are deteriorating, national programmes do not reach far enough, especially into isolated areas, family planning programmes are a woman's responsibility and are coercive, and other maternal and child health services are being ignored.

In education, services are also deteriorating. Preschool attendance is down, dropout rates are up and the enrolment of girls is down. There is a preference to encourage boys to

attend school. The majority of teachers are women, and all teachers are underpaid and have a low motivation to teach. Most Vietnamese teachers earn the bulk of their money teaching privately or working a second job.

There is also a lack of technical training for women, especially in the area of marketing. Training and extension is oriented towards men. Women often lack the time and confidence to attend training, and arrangements and topics are inappropriate.

In terms of credit and savings, women have a lack of access to formal credit and few facilities for savings. When a household receives a loan, it is generally controlled by the man, and sometimes results in disruption of the family. Loan terms are often inappropriate for women. Receiving credit may disproportionately increase a woman's workload.

The GAD working group saw its task as "feeding quantitative data to the World Bank." If the World Bank heard enough, they might listen. Lobbying (adapted to Vietnamese politics, of course) the State Planning Committee was considered as another course of action. The same data could be given to them to increase awareness of gender issues.

Concern was expressed that the World Bank's ten-year land titling programme will negatively affect women because titles will only go to heads of households, so women will not own property. Concern was also expressed about the future of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in Viet Nam. International

pressure groups watch the World Bank's policies and activities to keep them somewhat in line. There is no equivalent observer for the ADB, and consequently it is "less careful." The working group expressed the need to contact the ADB to make the bank aware of gender issues. The underlying concern was that the ADB may develop policies that will negatively affect Viet Nam in other ways beyond women's issues.

National debt is a gender issue. It will be paid for by the next generation. Whom do the loans and construction of today benefit, and who among the next generation will pay the most? Benefits are biased towards men, payments towards women.

The issues discussed at this meeting summarizes well the issues facing Vietnamese women in the process of their country's economic transition. The perspective of the participants was more negative than most of the other sources I consulted during my research in Canada. In spite of the perception in the literature that Vietnamese women are relatively well off in spite of the problems facing them, I agree with the more critical tone of the GAD working group.

I will return to these issues in more detail later in the thesis. Now I will provide an overview of the themes and structures of this thesis.

### 1.3 Overview of Thesis

This thesis has three equally important main themes, or strands: economic development, ecologically sustainable development (sometimes referred to as sustainable development), and women and development.<sup>9</sup> These three concepts are interconnected on many levels, and are ideally all elements of ecologically and socially sustainable development. Analytically, it is sometimes more useful to separate them, and sometimes to draw them together. This thesis does both; but because in the literature and in reality, their interrelated nature is not always recognized, they are dealt with as separate concepts throughout most of this thesis.

Chapter Two journeys through the theoretical literature on economic development, sustainable development, and women and development. It begins with economic development as a basis, because the dominant economic development theories and models form the basis of much of our ideas of what development is. Sustainable development and women and development are

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<sup>9</sup> I use the phrase "women and development" here not in the sense of the school of thought by the same name, commonly known by its acronym WAD. Indeed, all the obvious combinations of "women" and "development" have already been turned into schools of thought -- Women in Development, Women and Development, Gender and Development (all of which I will discuss below), so when I refer to women or gender and development in lower-case letters, I do not refer to specific theories.

I use "women" instead of "gender" because the recent focus on gender has resulted in the co-option of the term by patriarchal forces. "Women" calls attention to women's issues, which are not necessarily the same as gender issues.

presented as alternatives to orthodox economic development. Environment, with its natural, ecological connotation and women, with its social connotation, are the two significant concepts that are missing from the dominant development paradigm.

This chapter takes a historical approach to look at the history of thought in the areas of economic development, environment/sustainable development, and women and development. The chapter establishes the centrality of the themes for the rest of the thesis.

From the theoretical framework in Chapter Two, I develop a contextual framework in Chapter Three, and place the themes of economic development, sustainable development, and women and development, into their Vietnamese context. The introductory section provides a description of the country's history and culture. A description of Viet Nam's economic development focuses on the transition from socialism to capitalism. The next section examines environmental issues and current state of the environment. Finally, the status and role of women in Vietnamese society is examined.

Chapter Four presents an analysis of Vietnamese policy on the three themes, economic development, sustainable development, and women. I apply the objectives developed by the World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) to three government documents on the themes. This analysis results in a better understanding of

the nature of Viet Nam's development. It reveals several contradictions, however; not only in the Vietnamese government's vision of development, but also in the Brundtland Commissions's vision. These contradictions stem from an inadequate understanding of the nature of the interrelationship of the three strands.

These contradictions lead to a second theoretical examination of the three themes in Chapter Five. This time they are considered from the more holistic and integrative perspective that feminist frameworks provide. Looking at feminist writings on women, environment and development, ecofeminism, and global feminisms, I develop my own definition of "feminist sustainable development." I extract specific features of this framework, based on the principles of equality and non-exploitation, that would be useful for an analysis of Viet Nam. These elements include peace and violence, a political framework, poverty, population, ecological management, and the overarching need for a transformation of values and economic alternatives.

Chapter Six summarizes the thesis and applies features of the feminist sustainable development framework to the situation in Viet Nam. Using the principles of equality and non-exploitation it examines education, an accountable state, growth, and labour and makes recommendations for changes in Viet Nam's development policy. It also provides suggestions for further analysis and research. Finally I place Viet Nam

in the larger global context by exploring the implications of Viet Nam's commitment to the recent UN conferences on environment, social development and women, and considering Viet Nam's international role as a leader in development based on equality and non-exploitation.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT**

#### **2.1 Economic Development**

##### **2.1.1 Introduction to the Problems With Development**

This chapter is about economic development, sustainable development, and women and development. The theoretical literature of each theme will be examined in turn. My discussion of economic development theory begins with an empirical look at development, considers international policy recommendations, and then examines the theoretical background.

##### **2.1.2 The Crisis of Development**

Four decades of "development" have not succeeded in solving global poverty; in fact, many scholars claim that they have resulted in a crisis (Braidotti et al. 1994; Korten 1990). Many changes have occurred, some of them positive, but it is arguable whether "development" has meant "progress" in the sense of improvement for many developing nations. Globally, income disparity both within and between nations,

widespread poverty, and environmental degradation are increasing. Women are still oppressed, under-represented, and unequal to men. According to the UNDP (1995, 175), "no society treats its women as well as its men." Inequalities between men and women in the distribution of resources, income assets, and time are increasing (Vickers 1991, 23).

Nearly one billion people live in dire poverty and massive debts are limiting the ability of developing countries to provide their people with basic necessities of life (Kelly 1994, 130). One third of the world's population, for example, does not have access to clean water (Vickers 1993, 71). Each year, approximately 1.5 million children die due to the lack of basic food and medicine (Mayer in Kelly 1994, 84); infant mortality is ten times higher in developing countries than in the developed ones (Kelly 1994, 87); and one third of children are undernourished (Saul 1995, 12). The evidence provided by the data show that so-called 'development' has left us with more problems than answers.

### 2.1.3 The International Response

These problems have been recognised by the international community. The United Nations (UN), representing the nation-states of the world, has recently responded by sponsoring a series of summits seeking solutions to the "[v]ast political, economic and ecological crises persist[ing] in many parts of the world" (United Nations 1996, 33). These include the UN

Conference on Environment and Development (1992) (known as the "Earth Summit"), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the World Summit for Social Development (1995) (the "Social Summit"), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), and the Habitat II Conference (1996). These conferences address the "profound political, economic, social and cultural changes" that the world has recently experienced (United Nations 1996, 22) and the global challenges facing humanity.

Three of these summits are particularly relevant to the themes of this thesis: the Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the Summit for Social Development (WSSD), and the Conference on Women. The UNCED Conference formulated a plan of action for sustainable development that integrates environment and development concerns in order to achieve the "fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future" (United Nations 1992, 15).

The WSSD addressed the themes of social disintegration, unemployment and poverty and attempted to create an "enabling environment" in which these issues could be solved. It dealt with the "underlying and structural causes" as well as the "distressing consequences" of these issues, and affirmed the interdependent and mutually reinforcing nature of social development and economic development that is necessary for effectiveness (United Nations 1995).

The Fourth World Conference on Women also addressed these issues, as indicated by its subtitle, "Action for Equality, Development and Peace." Recognising the crucial importance of "the participation and leadership" of women in the search for solutions to global problems, it called for "radical transformation" of the relationships between women and men.

The Platform for Action proposes a model for a

peaceful, just and humane world based on human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the principle of equality for all people of all ages and from all walks of life (United Nations 1996, 18)

that is

based on a spirit of partnership, an equitable, international social and economic environment, and a radical transformation of the relationship between women and men to one of full and equal partnership [which] will enable the world to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century. (United Nations 1996, 24)

These summits and conferences are relevant to this thesis because they deal with the same themes: economic development, environment and sustainable development, and women and development. The plans of action that these events produced are important because they have been signed by heads of government of most nations. By signing these documents, the governments of the world have legitimized the issues and pledged their support to solve the problems.

The next step to understanding the current state of development, having looked at the problems and some ways in which the international community is attempting to solve them,

is to examine the theoretical basis of development policies and practices.

Since theory informs practice, it is important that the relationship between the dominant models of development and the problems of development be understood. Theory is also a useful tool for analysis of the problems of development.

#### 2.1.4 Paradigms of Economic Development

Since the 1950s when the discipline of development economics began, consensus has defined two paradigms in development economics: on an ideological level there is the liberal/radical distinction; on a theoretical level, orthodox/political economy distinction.<sup>1</sup> These theoretical paradigms, orthodox (also called classical or liberal) and political economy (also called Marxist), both grounded in economics, are unable to account for social and environmental aspects of development. Because of this inability to formulate a holistic theory of development, the models and approaches derived from these paradigms have been inadequate in practice, and are viewed by many as being responsible for the current "crisis of development."

I use the word 'paradigm' in the original sense of Thomas Kuhn (1962). A paradigm is a set of fundamental assumptions about the world. Although it is so basic that it is usually

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<sup>1</sup> See Hunt (1989) and Urbach (1987) for more on this point.

unstated or even unconscious, it is a powerful framework that structures our thinking. Everybody operates within one paradigm or another, but may not necessarily be aware of it, nor of the fact that other's paradigms may be radically different.

Viewing development economics as falling into one of these paradigms is to operate in a paradigm in itself, and anything that questions that paradigm constitutes an alternative paradigm. Feminist, post-modernists and other critics of mainstream development have done this questioning.<sup>2</sup> Rejecting the dualism inherent in the orthodox/political economy distinction, these critics have proposed radical alternatives to development that loosely fall into a third paradigm. Thus, some theorists define two new paradigms: economic based (including both orthodox and political economy) and non-economic based.<sup>3</sup> Rather than following this distinction and creating another dualism, I will briefly explain all three "paradigms." I will begin with the orthodox, then examine the political economy, and finally the alternative paradigm.

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<sup>2</sup> Also, the paradigms of non-Western cultures are fundamentally different.

<sup>3</sup> See Maguire (1987) for further treatment of this point.

#### A. The Orthodox Economic Development Paradigm

The orthodox economic development paradigm is the dominant model of the West, and has been followed in most of the world. Orthodox development economics is built on classical market theory (of Smith, Ricardo and others), but recognizes the role of the state. Development is predicated on the accumulation of physical capital. Industrialization is the engine that drives development. The state is responsible for the encouragement of crucial savings and investment. Benefits eventually trickle down from the rich to the poor. Trade within the world market would provide mutual benefits. Economic, political, and social institutions must be oriented toward "modern" capitalistic values.

W.W. Rostow, considered one of the "pioneers" of development, created modernization theory. Modernization theory attempts to outline how a society is transformed into a capitalist-oriented society (Rostow 1959). Rostow's goal was a "mass consumption society" and an emulation of American economic and political structures. Progress is measured in terms of the growth of economic output. Modernization theory assumes that growth and industrialisation are inevitable historical processes, and all countries will eventually achieve the levels of industrialized countries. Rostow's era, the 1940s and 1950s, was one of optimism and confidence; developing nations had only to follow the prescriptions of development economists, and they too would obtain the same

standards of living as the developed world. But as Saul wryly notes, "if economists were doctors, they would today be mired in malpractice suits" (1995, 4).

Criticisms within this paradigm have given rise to many approaches, theories, and models, as well as debates and controversies. Debates centre around the role of the state, and whether markets are self-regulating.

Neo-liberalism has been revived since the 1980s, both intellectually and politically. Conservative governments in the United States, United Kingdom, and France have led an international trend toward market liberalization and globalization (Welsh and Butorin 1990, 323). The International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programs (SAPs), which have been heavily criticized for their social and environmental costs, fall squarely into this paradigm.

#### B. The Political Economy Paradigm

The political economy paradigm originates in the Marxist critique of capitalism.<sup>4</sup> Marxism uses class relationships as the basis for its analysis and concludes that capitalism is responsible for the exploitation of the working class, who own neither the means of production nor the rights to their own

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<sup>4</sup> This paradigm is sometimes also called alternative or radical, to contrast it with the orthodox paradigm. The terms used in development studies are sometimes ambiguous and therefore confusing. In this paper, I use the terms radical and alternative for theories which fall into neither the orthodox nor political economy paradigm.

labour. It is concerned with the process of economic growth, not merely the end. This means that it requires "liberation from oppressive and exploitative relationships both internally, among people within the country, and externally, among nations (Wilber and Jameson 1984, 13). Marxism believes that capitalism bears the seeds of its own destruction, and all capitalist economies will inevitably undergo a socialist transformation.

Latin American discussion on underdevelopment produced the structuralist school<sup>5</sup> which developed the centre-periphery model, in which peripheral regions supported central regions, which benefitted from trade. Dependency theory<sup>6</sup> rejects the universalist orthodox prescriptions, and argues development and underdevelopment are interrelated processes that cause dependent relationships.

### C. The Alternative Paradigm

Both the orthodox and political economy paradigms are grounded in economics and do not address the environmental dimensions, and inadequately address social dimensions. Although Marxism has a broader social framework with its focus

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<sup>5</sup> Structuralism favoured import substitution industrialization to balance the centre-periphery asymmetry. For detailed accounts, see Hirschman (1961), Cardoso (1977). See also Furtado (1963), and Prebisch (1950), the most prominent structuralist.

<sup>6</sup> The dependency school grew out of Marxist structuralist thought. See Frank (1966), Baran (1957), Sunkel (1969), and Hettne (1990).

on social relationships and class struggle, it still ignores issues of gender and ethnicity. Both are predicated on control of nature, and both are patriarchal<sup>7</sup> systems.

Alternative development is a broad term applied to a diversity of theories and strategies of development that do not fall into the conventional economic development paradigms of orthodox and political economy. Indeed, they explicitly reject the existing paradigms and question conventional economic notions and values of development at a very fundamental level,<sup>8</sup> and they recognize, unlike modernization theory, that there is no one universal path to development.

In redefining development, other factors such as equity, equality, ecology, peace, and ethnicity become central. These concepts are generally not considered in conventional economic development theory and planning. One alternative definition of development is: "a process by which a community or a country develops the capacity to manage its own resources in a sustainable way to meet the needs of its people" (Korten 1992, 34). The following list includes some of the elements

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<sup>7</sup> Mies (1986, 38) argues that "capitalism cannot function without Patriarchy, that the ... never-ending process of capital accumulation ... cannot be achieved unless patriarchal man-woman relations are maintained or newly created."

<sup>8</sup> Examples of alternative development theories include egalitarian development, self reliant development, ecodevelopment and ethnodevelopment (Hettne 1990); feminist development, ecofeminism (see Chapter 5), counter-development, people-centred development (Korten 1984) and participatory development.

necessary for alternative development: meeting people's fundamental human needs; decentralization and democratization; ecologically sustainable development; equity; and respect for the diversity of people and communities (Hettne 1990). The alternative paradigm includes more than just the traditional basic needs in its list: protection, affection, understanding, participation, idleness, creation, identity, and freedom (Max-Neef, Elizalde and Hopenhayn 1989, 33), as well as the traditional basic needs of shelter, food, clean water, education, and employment.

Two significant components that are missing in conventional development theory are an ecological analysis and a social analysis. The body of literature on sustainable development women and development, respectively, address these issues. These frameworks developed alternatives to the conventional theories and contribute to the alternative paradigm by attempting to address these serious omissions, but some of their initially radical ideas have been adopted by mainstream development. Thus, it is not possible to place sustainable development and women and development solely in the alternative paradigm any more. These frameworks will be discussed further in sections two and three, respectively.

#### 2.1.5 Conclusion

The most serious problem with orthodox development has been its initial conception of focusing on a narrow economic

definition of development. The assumptions that informed the ensuing policy and practice of development resulted in "development" not meeting its goals of modernization and high standards of living. The opposing paradigm of political economy does not adequately address the problems of capitalist development. Thus the challenge is left to the alternative development paradigm to attempt to facilitate the process whereby the development process embraces a more just, egalitarian and sustainable vision.

## **2.2 Sustainable Development**

### **2.2.1 Global Environmental Degradation**

Sustainable development and environmental issues are closely intertwined. Sustainable development is a combination of development and environmental theory and frameworks. Having already discussed the former, I will examine the latter and its connection to sustainable development before considering sustainable development itself. First, however, I will take a look at the nature of the environmental degradation, and its relationship to development issues.

A growing ecological crisis faces the global population as we exceed the carrying capacity of our planet to sustain its population (Brown et al. 1994; 1995). Many forms of ecological degradation are affecting virtually all of the Earth's ecosystems, and its human inhabitants are becoming more and more affected.

Natural ecosystems are complex webs of living and non-living systems. The effects of degradation are far-reaching and one form of degradation often leads to others. For example, deforestation, erosion, desertification, and siltation, all common problems, are often interrelated. When forest cover is removed, erosion increases because the soil is no longer protected. The erosion causes siltation in rivers systems, desertification in marginal lands, and soil salination in coastal areas.

Pre-industrial societies tend to be less destructive of their ecosystems than industrialized ones, but the processes of industrialization and modernization often destroy the ability to sustain livelihoods and therefore force groups wishing to continue traditional methods and lifestyles onto marginal land. A spiralling cycle of poverty and environmental degradation results, as eking out a subsistence living becomes more and more difficult as the quality of the land decreases (Kelly 1994; Jackson 1990).

As the world population continues to grow, food and water sources are being limited (Postel in Brown et al. 1994, 3). Agricultural land is losing its fertility due to excessive use of pesticides and fertilizers; grasslands are overgrazed and fisheries over-harvested; the forests are receding; and water resources are being depleted and polluted in a number of ways.

Pollution of the air, water, and land are affecting human health as well as the health of ecosystems. Serious sources of pollution include industrial effluent and waste, urban waste, nuclear and toxic waste, agricultural pesticides and fertilizers, and the burning of fossil fuels for industry, heating, and transportation.

Postel (in Brown et al. 1994) identifies three global trends since mid-century that have contributed significantly to the excessive pressures being placed on natural systems: the doubling of the world population, the quintupling of global economic output, and the widening gap in income distribution.

Population growth is not in and of itself an environmental problem, although it is often considered to be one (this point is elaborated upon in Chapter Five). When a population grows beyond the ability of the ecosystem to sustain it, environmental degradation results. The countries of the developing world are often cited as culprits in the overpopulation debate; however, the developed countries are not at all blameless, as members of their smaller populations use a much greater proportion of the world's resources, and place a greater burden on the global ecosystem (WCED 1987, 56). Another factor to consider is the need that living in poverty places on having children: in poor families, children are considered to be economic security. Their labour is needed in household and agricultural tasks, and their income

to care for their parents in their old age. High infant and child mortality rates in many areas also add to families' decisions to have many children. So while population growth issues must be addressed, they must be addressed within the reality of First World overconsumption and Third World poverty.

Economic growth in most of the world has been "of the most damaging kind" (Postel in Brown et al. 1994, 6), depending heavily on the extraction and consumption of non-renewable resources. These extraction and consumption practices also lead to large amounts of pollution, both in the production process and in waste.

The industrialized world bears a large burden of the blame for the damages to the global ecosystems of the environmentally damaging growth. Overconsumption of water, energy, food, and resources by the people of the West is wasteful and unsustainable at current levels. If everyone in the world consumed as much food as the average American for example, the global harvest would have to be two to six times greater than current levels (Postel in Brown et al. 1994, 6), which is simply impossible. Thus it is the "exploitative economics, industrial policies and way of life" of the West that is responsible for the environmental degradation and poverty of the developing world (Kelly 1994, 114).

The gap in income distribution also contributes significantly to environmental degradation. The extremes of

the income spectrum, both rich and poor, cause the most environmental degradation: the rich because of overconsumption, the poor because of marginal living. This gap has its basis in social and political relations of power. Inequalities and inequities between sexes, classes and nations, based in cultural and social systems, lead to economic inequality. As Kelly (1994, 38) points out, the benefits of the oppressive global political and economic systems are reserved for the privileged few with wealth and power (38).

To Postel's three factors in environmental degradation, population growth, economic growth, and income distribution, I would add a fourth. Culture is a significant factor in environmental degradation. The Western Christian heritage encourages humanity's domination of nature. Other cultural heritages, such as many indigenous cultures, have a more harmonious relationship with nature. Often, these are the groups referred to earlier, that get trapped into poverty as a result of their refusal to hold industrial values.

### 2.2.2 History of Environmental Thought and its Relevance to Sustainable Development

Although the term "sustainable development" is relatively new, it has diverse historical roots.<sup>9</sup> Among them are transcendentalist thinkers like Henry David Thoreau and Ralph

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<sup>9</sup> See Worster (1994) for a more detailed discussion on the history of ecological thought.

Waldo Emerson, who based their philosophy in a reaction to the progress model that was dominating Western society in the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> One of the elements of transcendentalism was a conservation movement that wanted to preserve wilderness against encroaching industrial society. It also included a scientific component to promote better management of nature. One of the conservationists, George Perkins Marsh, is considered responsible for the modern concept of ecology (Clarke 1993). Another conservationist was Aldo Leopold whose strong sense of ethics turned the environment into a political issue:

We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. (cited in Devall and Sessions 1985, 68)<sup>11</sup>

The modern environmental movement, beginning in the 1960s, addressed a wider range of social concerns, including poverty, overpopulation, resource depletion, and food production, but drew in part on the philosophy of the conservationist movement. Rachel Carson published her highly influential Silent Spring in 1960. In the 1970s, the Club of

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<sup>10</sup> All of this discussion on the history of the environmental movement is based in part on a seminar given by R. Clarke in Environmental Studies 5030A, Dalhousie University, September 22, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into Eastern traditions of ecological thought. An excellent source for readers interested in nature in Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist thought (the three traditions in Viet Nam) is Callicott and Ames (1989).

Rome published its influential Limits to Growth, which argued the limits to which we can take our growth-oriented economic society. E.F. Schumacher (1977) argued that Small is Beautiful, which advocated simpler and smaller economies as being more environmentally sustainable. These works were important because they addressed social and economic issues, as well as ecological and conservation issues. They were politicized and radical.<sup>12</sup>

In 1972, the UN Conference on the Human Environment (also called the Stockholm conference) became the first of a series of UN conferences on environmental and development issues. In 1980, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) prepared the World Conservation Strategy, which had an overall aim of "achieving sustainable development through conservation of living resources" (Lélé 1992, 610; Pietila 1991, 196). This strategy attempted to reconcile the development community and environment movement, but it was inadequate to deal with more complex issues, such as the international political and economic order, war, national security, and nuclear arms issues. It addressed ecological sustainability, but not sustainable development.

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Thrupp (1990) for further discussion on the modern environmental movement.

### 2.2.3 The Complexity of Sustainable Development

Sustainable development theory combines development and environmental issues. It addresses the environmental degradation that is a by-product of industrial development. It searches to determine whether and how economic growth and industrialization can be sustainable.

"Sustainable development" is a difficult concept to define. It means different things to different people; it has many layers of complexity because it deals with broad, difficult, and highly political questions. As early as 1980, Tolba was already calling sustainable development "an article of faith; a shibboleth; often used but little explained" (Tolba cited in Lélé 1992, 607), and this statement is even more true today. Its ambiguity has some use in that it can enable people with irreconcilable positions in the environment/development debate to search for common ground, without appearing to compromise their positions greatly (Lélé 1992, 607). However, the key word is "appearing," and as I shall explain below, economic development is irreconcilable with true environmental sustainability. As an empty slogan, "sustainable development" is in danger of being co-opted by agencies such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and OECD, which have adopted the rhetoric without demonstrating that they will foster any more environmentally sound or socially meaningful development (Lélé 1992, 607). It is also convenient for policy makers at all levels to hop on the

sustainable development bandwagon, and cover mal-development in the newest politically correct rhetoric.

One's position on the spectrum of sustainable development depends on one's world-view: whether one sees economics within the context of ecology, or ecology within the context of economics. This fundamental difference is a key to understanding the sustainable development debate.

Some common synonyms for sustainable development include ecologically sustainable development, environmentally sound development, sustained growth, sustained change, and successful development. These last three terms are not true to the spirit of sustainable development. Sustained growth cannot be sustained in the long term, but rather, only in the short term.<sup>13</sup> The earth's resources are finite. Unless "growth" were reconceptualized to achieve "growth with our current resources," sustained growth is an oxymoron (unless resources were infinite); it is at best misleading, and at worst, a dangerous goal. "Sustained change" is a rather meaningless phrase; taken out of context it has little

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<sup>13</sup> The concepts, "short-term" and "long-term" are vague; economists and politicians tend to think in terms of five- or ten-year plans, archaeologists think in terms of centuries. In the context of sustainable development, I am using "long-term" to mean over generations; indefinitely but not infinitely (although some sustainable development theories do take an infinite approach). I will be more flexible with "short-term", using it to refer to a few years to a few decades. In terms of sustainability, however, anything short-term is by definition unsustainable. Redclift notes that long-term ecological and economic interests in the environment do converge, however much they may diverge in the short-term (1988, 638).

relevance to sustainable development. If the change desired is economic growth, it becomes a euphemism for sustained growth. Finally, "successful development" is also a misuse of the central concepts of sustainable development:

For economic development to be truly sustainable requires tailoring the design and implementation of the projects to the needs and capabilities of people who are supposed to benefit from them. (Barbier in Lélé 609)<sup>14</sup>

This example of "successful development" says nothing about resource management or future generations which are important considerations in project management. Although development projects should increase self-sufficiency and continue after the implementation agencies have left, most have a short term and non-ecological focus.

Having looked at three interpretations of "sustainable development" that are not sound, I turn to two definitions of sustainable development that are consistent with the concept of sustainability. One, given by the Brundtland Commission, is politically pragmatic; the other, which takes an ecological perspective, is more idealistic.

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<sup>14</sup> This is an example of people-centred development, which I do not mean to dismiss. People-centred development gives an important social alternative to the economic model of viewing people as exploitable renewable resources. It remains incomplete, however, without a component of ecological sustainability.

#### A. The Brundtland Commission on Sustainable Development

The World Commission on Environment and Development (popularly known as the Brundtland Commission) in 1987 generated widespread popularity (Pietila 1991) for the concept of sustainable development in its report, Our Common Future. It was influential in many ways; among others it changed environmental discourse from a focus on ameliorating existing environmental problems to a "preventative and human centred approach to sustainable development" (Wacker in Harcourt 1994, 128). Its definition has formed the basis of further thought on sustainable development:

sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (WCED 1987, 43)

The report, Our Common Future, also composed a list of critical objectives that it considers essential to achieving the goal of sustainable development. These objectives include:

- 1 reviving growth;
  - 2 changing the quality of growth;
  - 3 meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water and sanitation;
  - 4 ensuring a sustainable level of population;
  - 5 conserving and enhancing the resource base;
  - 6 reorienting technology and managing risk;
  - 7 merging environment and economics in decision-making.
- (WCED 1987, 49)

These guidelines, if followed, would certainly change the practice of development, and would require substantial changes in the global economic order. These guidelines are discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

## B. An Ecological Approach to Sustainable Development

The Brundtland Commission's definition of sustainable development allows for growth; in fact it encourages it, within certain limits. On the other hand, an ecological approach to sustainable development<sup>15</sup> does not encourage growth. Rather, it considers any form of growth using non-renewable resources unsustainable.

The ecological perspective is centred around "natural capital", a resource in its raw form (as opposed to manufactured capital, the industrial means of production; and human capital, the social means of production). Natural capital can be considered to be goods or services. Natural services, such as nutrient cycling, erosion control, the cleaning and detoxifying of the environment by many biological processes, are generally assumed to be free and are undervalued by conventional economics, but they are essential. Natural capital is either renewable or non-renewable; and renewable capital is only renewable if it is managed properly.

A sustainable economic system of whatever scale can by definition only be based on renewable natural capital and will continue to be sustainable only if the natural resources are managed properly. This definition of sustainable development takes a long-term view. Ecosystems which may be sustainable

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<sup>15</sup> The ideas in this section are taken from a lecture given by H. Whitehead in Environmental Studies 5030A, Dalhousie University, September 29, 1993.

in the short term may be unsustainable in the long-term and would not be considered acceptable.

This ecological view of sustainable development gives a unique perspective on development. It differentiates between development as a phase and development as a state. The former is a dynamic process in which a net consumption of resources is possible, if not inevitable. The latter is a state of equilibrium in which the net consumption of resources is zero. By this definition, all human societies are still in the process of development and have not yet reached the stage of sustainable development.

#### 2.2.4 Conclusion

This section has provided an overview of the sustainable development debate. It has shown how environmental and development issues have become intertwined. It has also shown the complex nature of the term "sustainable development," and given several interpretations.

For the analysis of sustainable development in Viet Nam in Chapter Four, I will use the criteria established by the Brundtland report. Although the ecological approach is ultimately more sustainable, the Brundtland definition is more politically useful. It brought widespread acceptance for the concept of sustainable development, and formed the basis for the Rio Declaration, which many governments have pledged to follow.

The Brundtland definition also provides a better social analysis than the ecological definition. Since social analysis is such a crucial component of any theory that addresses the complexities of development, in the next section, I will discuss the women and development literature, which is grounded in social critiques of economic development.

## **2.3 Women and Development**

### **2.3.1 Introduction**

Just as sustainable development theory adds the ecological perspective to development, women and development theories rethink development from a feminist perspective. In this section, I establish that development is often harmful to women, just as it often harms the environment. Then I look at various approaches that have been taken in regards to women and development.

Most feminist analyses of women and development agree that women have not benefitted from development as much as men, and that "development" has done women more harm than good. The criticisms of development that sustainable development theory makes are amplified when women are considered in their own right. Where development has been environmentally destructive, women have borne the brunt (see, for example, Diamond 1994; Shiva 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1994; Dankelman and Davidson 1988; Sen and Grown 1987). Morgan describes the situation of women globally:

While women represent half the global population and one-third of the labor [sic] force, they receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than one percent of world property. They are also responsible for two-thirds of all working hours. ... Not only are females most of the poor, the starving, and the illiterate, but women and children constitute more than 90 percent of all refugee populations. (1984, 1-2)

To understand women and development, one must consider more than development indicators, asking and examining individual women, or even communities, and comparing advantages and disadvantages. After forty years of the development experiment women have many stories to tell, in many voices, in choruses and alone. An understanding of patriarchal power structures is also necessary to understand the systemic oppression and exploitation of women in developing as well as developed countries.

### 2.3.2 Women's Oppression

An excellent metaphor to explain the systemic nature of patriarchal oppression is given by Marilyn Frye (1983). A birdcage is made of many bars, fashioned into a structure. If one were to examine a single bar, one could not understand why the bird cannot move around it and fly away; one bar would not hold it back. Only a view of the structure of the entire cage makes one understand how a cage keeps the bird enclosed. Similarly, examining one aspect of discrimination against women will not lead one to understand the true nature of women's oppression.

"When we speak of the 'poorest of the poor', we are always speaking about women (Vickers 1991, 15). Many examples can be cited: in Rwanda, women work nearly three times as much as men in the house and in the fields (Vickers 1991, 21); maternity kills half a million women a year (Vickers 1991, 27); women constitute the largest group of landless labourers in the world (Kelly 1994, 15); women in Gadkharkh, India must walk 10 to 12 kilometres every morning to collect firewood for cooking (Dankelman and Davidson 1988, 46); in some areas women and children make up to 90 per cent of the refugees (Dankelman and Davidson 1988, 90). These are all single bars in women's cages. Often, analysis is limited to only one or several bars, and it is not understood that all the factors work together as a system to cage women.

An analysis of the structures of oppression and domination of men over women reveal that they are "deep and systemic, and [are] accepted around the world by most men and many women as 'natural'" (Kelly 1984, 10).

### 2.3.3 Women's Roles in Economic Development

The recent analysis of women's roles in economic development begins with Ester Boserup's 1970 work, Woman's Role in Economic Development, which is considered a seminal work (Mitter in Boserup 1989; Maguire 1984; Rathgeber 1989) in analysing women's contribution to productive work and a country's economic development. Her book documents both

women's traditional work in the village, and its changing nature as a result of technological modernization, especially in agriculture, and urban migration. Her analysis explores the cultural and historical context of countries and regions, emphasizing the differences and their effects on economic development. This too is a significant departure from traditional economic theory which assumes that the process of development is the same for all societies, once certain universal preconditions have been met (eg. Rostow's theory). Boserup's work had varied results: as well as inspiring and forming the basis for further investigation and understanding of women's roles, it alerted development donor agencies to common misallocations of resources that arose from misunderstanding women's role; and it inspired the UN Decade for Women (1975 to 1985) (Mitter in Boserup 1989, 1).

One of Boserup's most significant conclusions was that

The recruitment of women to the modern sector helps to accelerate the growth of the economy beyond the rate attainable by the use of male labour alone (211).

In other words, women's labour is essential to development, not a convenient extra. Women's contribution becomes even more significant when their unremunerated labour is taken into account, as Waring (1988) and Henderson (1991) have pointed out.

Several schools of thought regarding women and development have been developed since Boserup's analysis. WID (Women in Development), WAD (Women And Development) and GAD

(Gender And Development) are the most common acronyms found in the women and development literature and practice. All have different philosophical bases for dealing with women and development issues.<sup>16</sup>

#### 2.3.4 Women In Development

Women In Development (WID), developed in the early 1970s, grew out of Boserup's analysis (Rathgeber 1989; Maguire 1984). The term, WID, was first used by the women's committee of the Washington D.C. Society for International Development (SID), which tried to have women explicitly included in development policy and practice. These efforts of American liberal feminists focused on remedying the inequalities that women in developing countries experience by integrating them into economic activities, to minimize discrimination and disadvantage in the productive sector, and increase their economic independence (Jaquette 1982; Rathgeber 1989).

WID was based on the dominant modernization development paradigm. To a large extent it did not question the premises of this development; rather, it focused on bringing women into it (Rathgeber 1989). It did not address women's subordination

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<sup>16</sup> WID, WAD and GAD are "not entirely conceptually distinct" categories (Rathgeber 1989, 15). Other theories address gender and development issues, and share some features with WID, WAD, and GAD; among these are post-modernism, WED, integrative feminisms (Miles 1996), and Third World and global feminisms.

as a result of underlying patriarchal structures, but believed that "gender relations will change of themselves as women become full economic partners in development" (Rathgeber 1989, 7). It did not recognize more critical perspectives on women or development, such as dependency theory, Marxist or socialist feminisms.

Apffel-Marglin and Simon (1994) criticize WID for "posit[ing] an essentialist universal subordination of women, and development as a vehicle for eradicating male dominance" (32); this perspective invalidates any perception of women of themselves that do not fit the WID (ie, Western feminist) standards of a successful woman as "autonomous, economically independent, ... fully integrated into a commodified world" (33). WID does not do justice to the experiences of Third World women.

### 2.3.5 Women And Development

Women and Development (WAD) emerged in the late 1970s as a response to the limitations of WID and modernization theory in general. It draws its theoretical basis from dependency theory and Marxist feminism. The essence of WAD philosophy is that women have always been part of development processes and were not suddenly "discovered" a few years ago. Since women "have always been important economic actors in their societies and ... the work they do both inside and outside the household is central to the maintenance of these societies" (Rathgeber

1989, 8), including them in "development" is nothing new. Thus their subordination is linked to their role in economic development, and a deeper analysis is required.

WAD began the analysis of women's productive and reproductive roles. This analysis did not go far enough, according to its critics. It "fails to undertake a full-scale analysis of the relationship between patriarchy, differing modes of production, and women's subordination and oppression" (Rathgeber 1989, 9).

Another criticism of WAD was that its analysis of class was inadequate, and it was more clearly present in its theory than its implementation (Rathgeber 1989, 8). In practice, it tends to consider women as a homogeneous whole, without considering class, race or ethnicity factors that influence their social position.

Like WID, WAD also failed to address women's reproductive labour. Activities such as childbearing and rearing, care of the ill and elderly, housework and other "family maintenance" activities were considered outside the sphere of development. Thus, WID and WAD's emphasis on income-generating activities without considering women's household labour led to greater burdens on women (Rathgeber 1989).

#### 2.3.6 Gender And Development

GAD (Gender and Development) emerged out of critiques of both WID and WAD, in the early 1980s, attempting to attain a

more comprehensive analysis of women's oppression, including class and race, and linking women's burden of reproductive labour to their subordinate position in society (Jaquette 1982). It was informed by socialist feminism, which understands women's oppression as based in the social construction of production and reproduction. GAD deals with the social relations of gender, questioning gender roles in all societies.

Key elements of the GAD approach include a holistic perspective that examines "the totality of social organization, economic and political life in order to understand the shaping of particular aspects of society" (Young cited in Rathgeber 1989, 11); an emphasis on gender relationships, not women in particular; an analysis of women's productive and reproductive labour; and a view of women as agents of change.

GAD's fundamental questioning of social, political, and economic structures makes it less practical for use in development strategies and programmes than the WID approach (Rathgeber 1989). It shares this difficulty with other radical approaches to development.

#### 2.3.7 Global Feminisms and DAWN

DAWN (Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era) is an organization of feminists from the economic South who criticize the dominant models of development, including the

WID approach. DAWN's aim is to develop a global women's network that will develop an alternative development paradigm based on southern women's experience, perception and analysis (Sen and Grown 1987, 116).<sup>17</sup>

DAWN's approach to development is people-centred, not economy-centred. It is based in a feminist vision of "equitable development based on values of co-operation, resistance to hierarchies, sharing, accountability, and commitment to peace" (117). This vision ensures that DAWN's analysis is social as well as economic.

DAWN's vision of development is similar to the feminist sustainable development framework that will be explored in Chapter Five. DAWN's perspective will be discussed in more detail there. Because of its basis in Southern feminism, I find DAWN's approach especially appropriate for Viet Nam.

### 2.3.8 Conclusion

This section has addressed the second "gap" in dominant economic development theory. The feminist approach brings a critical social analysis of development, and discusses the role and needs of women in development policies and practices. This theoretical background provides context for looking at women's issues in Viet Nam in Chapter Three. This theory also informs the analysis of Viet Nam's policy in Chapter Four.

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<sup>17</sup> An important difference between GAD and DAWN is that the latter is grounded in Southern feminism, while the former stems from the West.

#### **2.4 Summary and Conclusions of Chapter**

To summarize, this chapter has examined the three approaches that are congruent with the three themes of this thesis, namely economic development, sustainable development, and women and development. The crisis of development that the world faces today has been brought about by inadequate models that come out of the narrowly-focused dominant paradigm of economic development. Alternatives to the limitations of that paradigm include sustainable development and women and development. Sustainable development brings in ecological themes and debates the role and nature of economic growth. Feminist approaches provide a critical social analysis and have resulted in transformative visions of development.

The analysis of the theoretical literature reasserts the importance of including ecological and feminist perspectives in development thinking, policies, and practices. This theoretical understanding provides a background for examining the Vietnamese context of development, environment, and women's issues in Chapter Three. It also provides a model of analysis for more in-depth analysis in Chapter Four. These bodies of literature also inform the feminist sustainable development framework that will be developed in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THE VIETNAMESE CONTEXT**

#### **3.1 Introduction to Viet Nam: Geography, History, Culture**

The previous chapter examined economic development, sustainable development, and women and development from a theoretical perspective. This chapter will build on these strands and place them in the context of Viet Nam's historical and recent development. First, I will undertake a general overview of the physical and demographic features of Viet Nam before outlining a broad history of the country, taking into consideration its culture and ethnic minorities. This will be followed by a discussion of the themes of the thesis, economic development, environment, and women.

Before I embark on this description, I will stress to demonstrate the importance of providing this general description of Viet Nam. It is clearly necessary to counter the inaccuracies of the popular images of Viet Nam that we have in the West.

### 3.1.1 Western Perceptions of Viet Nam

In the West, we have a very narrow and distorted picture of Viet Nam; even if we have avoided the Vietnam War and the subsequent storm of Hollywood movies, we still know little. Most North Americans, for example, associate Tet with the Tet Offensive, not the celebration of the lunar new year, Viet Nam's most important festival. According to Wiegersma,

[t]o the average Westerner, Vietnam is an agglomeration of huts in the countryside with rice paddies and graveyards or a Saigon city slum. Vietnam is 'Charlie', an elusive and effective fighter. (1988, 1)

Brazier describes the North American image of Viet Nam as

a nightmare land where American boy soldiers were assailed by faceless, ruthless guerillas; a symbol of hardline communism where the party brooks no dissent and cuts itself off from the mainstream of the world; a country so forbidding that thousands of "boat people" have risked their lives in flimsy craft on the open seas to escape it. (1992, 3)

For its own sake, this information gap must be addressed, as well as being necessary to understand this thesis.

I went to Viet Nam having read several encyclopedia articles (one of which began its section on history with French colonialism) and a few pages here and there in travel books. And of course the vivid images of Platoon which I watched as a teenager were strong in my mind; I had found little with which to replace them. My work and travels in Viet Nam bridged the gap between popular media and subsequent

library research to give me a greater appreciation of the vibrancy and diversity of the Vietnamese people.

### 3.1.2 Physical and Demographic Description of Viet Nam

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, a peninsula along the western shore of the South China Sea covering 332 561 square kilometres, is bordered by Cambodia, China, and Laos. It is shaped like two baskets of rice hanging from a stick, an appropriate image of a land where rice is not only a dietary staple but the basis of a way of life.<sup>1</sup> The major rice growing areas and population centres, the deltas of the Red and Mekong rivers, are in the basket-shaped regions.

Vietnam's population in 1993 was 71.3 million people (World Bank 1995a), which resulted in a population density of 214 persons per square kilometre. Much of Viet Nam is mountainous and sparsely inhabited, so the density in many populated areas is much higher. Viet Nam is second only to Bangladesh in terms of the farming population per hectare of cultivated land (Brazier 1992, 7). The great majority of the population is concentrated in the lowlands, predominantly in the deltas of the Red and Mekong rivers. Hanoi, Viet Nam's capital and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), Viet Nam's largest cities, are situated in the northern and southern

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<sup>1</sup> An examination of the changing role that rice has played in Vietnamese society and economy can be found in Norlund et al. (1986).

deltas respectively. Twenty per cent of the population is urban, eighty per cent is rural (UNICEF 1990, 7).

The population growth rate was 2.2 per cent in 1993 (World Bank 1995a). There are more women than men (53 per cent) (Vietnam Women's Union n.d.) and the population is very young (Tran and Allen 1992, 1). This is a legacy of the war, where the mortality rate was high, especially among men. Since the war, the birth rate has been high, but has dropped significantly in the last decade (Tran and Allen 1992, 1).

### 3.1.3 Historical Overview

The physical and demographic characteristics of Viet Nam described above show *inter alia* that the country is densely populated and mountainous. A brief survey of Viet Nam's history reveals that foreign powers have always expressed a desire to conquer and control the country. Vietnam's history is a long story of resistance against larger powers seeking to dominate the small peninsula, and of the oppression of the majority of the population under a small and powerful elite. Brazier sees the Vietnamese people's "history of suffering and the awesomely generous way in which they deal with that legacy" as central to their character (1992, 5).

Their early history gave the Vietnamese people a strong sense of identity, which was important in their continuous resistance to foreign intervention (Wiegersma 1988, 26). Viet Nam was dominated by Chinese rule for over 1000 years; then by

European colonialism and Western imperialism from the 1800s until 1975.<sup>2</sup>

Vietnamese history predates the Chinese invasion of 111 BCE<sup>3</sup> by many centuries. The society was village-based, communal and agricultural, formed around rice cultivation, which women are said to have discovered (Wiegersma 1988, 28). Remnants of indigenous culture remain today.

The Chinese occupied Viet Nam from 111 BCE until 981 CE, transforming a communal society by introducing the hierarchical tradition of Confucianism, which remained a fundamental part of Vietnamese society. The feudal system was controlled by a small elite of kings and lords who owned the land and thus controlled the economic and political life of the majority of powerless peasants. The vast majority of peasants laboured hard for a subsistence existence; they had no rights and were subject to the whims of their lords.

The Vietnamese finally drove out the Chinese in the 10th century. Until the 15th century, local nobility controlled small regions. In the 15th century, the Le dynasty introduced a centralized administrative structure that lasted until the early 17th century when two rival families, the northern Trinh

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<sup>2</sup> For further reading on Vietnamese history, see Jamieson (1993), Karnow (1983) and Vien (1993). Lamb's essay (1976) on the American-Vietnamese war gives a clear chronology of the events until 1964 and a critical perspective. For history that deals with women, see Wiegersma (1988), Eisen Bergman (1975) and Eisen (1984).

<sup>3</sup> BCE (Before Common Era) and CE (Common Era) are alternatives to the Christian-centred terms of BC and AD.

and the southern Nguyen, began a fight for power, which turned into civil war.

Western contact with the Vietnamese began in the 18th century. It consisted of trading in munitions, which supported the civil wars between the ruling families of the north and south, and Catholic missionary activities in the villages.

The French began to occupy and colonise Viet Nam (which it divided into three parts, Cochinchina, Annam and Tonkin) in 1860. French Indochina, consisting of Laos, Cambodia and Viet Nam, was conquered by the beginning of the 20th century. France controlled Indochina until 1940. The French made many institutional and infrastructure changes, but never understood the social system enough to make their policies have their intended effects (Wiegersma 1988, 67). They upheld and enhanced oppressive social structures (Eisen 1984). The life of peasants, both male and female, continued to be difficult under French colonial policy. Women continued to suffer disproportionately more than men.

The anticolonial movement which began in the early 20th century, merged with the communist movement. It worked toward the overthrow of French imperialism and the Vietnamese capitalist class, and Vietnamese independence.

In 1940, the French Vichy government allowed the Japanese into its Indochinese territory, which the Japanese soon took

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over. The Viet Minh<sup>4</sup> was founded by Ho Chi Minh in 1941; this broad unity front opposed both Japan and colonialism. Four years later, in 1945, the Viet Minh led the August Revolution, which resulted in the declaration of an independent republic, the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam. At the end of the war, however, the British helped the French retake power in Viet Nam. The Viet Minh's agreement to divide power did not last, and nine years of war, the first Indochina War, followed. The capture of Dien Bien Phu in 1954 by the Viet Minh resulted in the Geneva agreements, which provided for the withdrawal of the French, elections in 1956, and the withdrawal of the Viet Minh to north of the 17th parallel. The elections were to reunify the country, but instead the South proclaimed itself the Republic of Vietnam. The Ngo Dinh Diem government in Saigon was considered by many to be a puppet regime of the United States. The Diem regime was anti-Communist; former members of the Viet Minh formed the Viet Cong to oppose it with military action.

The U.S. joined the war between North and South Viet Nam in 1961, providing the South with "military advisors". By 1969 almost 600 000 U.S. soldiers were fighting a war in which more tons of bombs were dropped than in all of World War II, and chemical and biological weapons were used widely against peasants and resistance forces alike. Fifteen years of war

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<sup>4</sup> Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi, or League for the Independence of Viet Nam.

ended in 1975. By this time, 70 per cent of the northern villages had been destroyed, and over 10 million hectares of productive land was unusable. Two million Vietnamese were killed, and another four million were maimed and injured. Ten million peasants were forced to flee their homes. The ecological destruction from the war will be examined further below.

Viet Nam was reunified in 1976. Elections were held, and a transition to socialism began. Agriculture was turned into a system of co-operatives, and private industry was taken over by the state. In 1979 Vietnam invaded Cambodia, responding to instigation by the Chinese government, and China invaded Vietnam, causing heavy fighting along Viet Nam's northern border.<sup>5</sup> Relations with China remained tense throughout the 1980s, and several border clashes occurred. A severe drought in 1979 and six typhoons in late 1980 added to the devastation of a country still recovering from a long bout of military conflict.

Vietnam's constitution declares that all state power belongs to the people. In practical terms, executive power at the national level rests in the Council of State and the Council of Ministers. The National Assembly, elected by the people, holds legislative power. The Communist Party of

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on the complex political situation between China, Cambodia and Viet Nam, see Wieggersma (1988).

Vietnam dominates both the state and society; no other political parties exist.

This brief historical survey has demonstrated the significance of Viet Nam in a global context and the struggles of its peoples for sovereignty. These struggles are reflective of the culture of the Vietnamese people which will be considered in the next section.

#### 3.1.4 Culture

As in all of East Asia, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism have been influential in shaping Vietnamese society throughout its history (Thich 1975). The Vietnamese "practised Buddhist meditation, observed Confucian ethics, and acknowledged the way of Taoism" (Thich 1975, 178). Buddhism, the earliest religion, became the religion of the majority of Vietnamese, while Confucianism was an significant force in shaping social thought and structure, introducing rules for social interaction, the patriarchal family, and ancestor worship. Taoism contributed to the mysticism and magic that is still popular today. Spiritually there is no conflict between the three religions; all are seen as aspects of the same truth (Thich 1975) but socially there have been frictions between Confucianism and Buddhism, and later between Catholicism (introduced by the French) and Buddhism. Buddhism gave the Vietnamese a non-aggressive way of resisting the imposition of Chinese rule and institutions (Wiegersma 1988, 29).

These religious foundations of the Vietnamese people's culture have served them well because, although their country was occupied at different periods of its history by foreign powers, they have been able to develop a unique blend of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism to resist imperial domination. Additional aspects of Vietnamese culture will be explored further in Section Four below, where women are discussed.

### 3.1.5 Ethnic Minorities

Viet Nam is divided into a number of ethnic groups with the Kinh being the majority. Although Viet Nam's ethnic minorities are not a focal point of this thesis, it is important to mention them briefly: not only are they an important part of Vietnamese society that get too easily overlooked,<sup>6</sup> but they also fit into the larger themes of feminist sustainable development, justice and oppression.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Viet Nam's ethnic minorities face many of the same problems that indigenous peoples everywhere face. Their situation "is no better than elsewhere, and perhaps it is worse given the absence of freedom ... to organize or to establish contacts with other indigenous peoples for solidarity" (Evans 1992, 301). Although they are granted constitutional rights, government policy has been colonial and an attempt at integrating them into the dominant Kinh society (Evans 1992, Gammelgaard 1990). The government gives the ethnic minorities an important role in the development and security of the country; it is unclear whether this is to the benefit of the minority groups or the country as a whole.

<sup>7</sup> Issues of race and ethnicity intersect with women's issues and are relevant to a feminist analysis of Vietnamese society, but they are beyond the scope of this thesis.

As well, their agricultural practices have become an environmental issue. The largest ethnic group in Viet Nam, the Kinh, makes up approximately 86-88 per cent of the population. Fifty-four tribal groups account for the rest of the population; the majority of these ethnic minorities inhabit the highland regions. As a result, Viet Nam is among the most culturally diverse countries of Southeast Asia. The populations of the minority groups vary in size from several hundred thousands to less than 200.

Most of the ethnic minorities live traditionally, in or at the edge of forests. They are very vulnerable to environmental degradation, because their lives are based on the land. They often practice swidden agriculture, for which they have been blamed for environmental degradation. Swidden, or slash and burn, agriculture is often blamed for soil erosion and other environmental problems (UNICEF 1990; Evans 1992). When practised properly, however, swidden is sustainable (Kemf 1990; Redclift 1989, 19). It becomes problematic when its practitioners, usually among the poorer groups in a country, are pushed onto marginalised land, when the better land is seized by the state for agriculture or silviculture, and when populations increase and the amount of available land decreases. Fields are not allowed to lie fallow long enough and the forest cannot recover. In Viet Nam, the ethnic groups practising swidden agriculture are being displaced by unrestricted population growth and Kinh

(Vietnamese) moving into the highlands through resettlement programmes (Kemf 1990)<sup>8</sup>. Because swidden agriculture is an easy scapegoat, the underlying problems in traditional societies are often ignored or exacerbated. The problems of agriculture are related to the overall issue of economic development in Viet Nam which will be examined in the next section.

### **3.2 Economic Development in Viet Nam**

#### **3.2.1 Background**

In this section, Viet Nam's economic development will be considered from the point of view of the country's economy, the economic transition from socialism to capitalism, and the negative societal effects of that transition. In the past half-century, the Vietnamese economy has gone through several transformations: from feudal-colonial structures to a socialist transformation; three decades of a war economy; socialist construction, based on state control and planning; and the current shift toward a market economy. Today, less than two decades after the end of conflict with France, the United States, and Cambodia, Viet Nam remains among the

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<sup>8</sup> For a description of how resettlement of Kinh resulted in environmental problems in Vinh Phu province, and how they were solved, see Le Van Lanh (1992).

poorest countries of the world, with a GNP per capita of US\$ 170 in 1993<sup>9</sup> (World Bank 1995a).

France's main purpose in Viet Nam was the "economic development of the country in ways which would benefit the French capitalists" (Wiegman 1988, 67). The French expanded transportation facilities and irrigation facilities, which increased rice production and export. They changed the land holding system and financial systems and burdened villages with heavy taxes. They established plantations, mines and industries which employed Vietnamese workers at scanty wages in terrible conditions. The plantations were known as "hell on earth" (Eisen 1984, 25).

Viet Nam's economy has traditionally been and still is primarily agricultural, with a small industrial base. The North is more industrialized than the South, with heavy industry concentrated in the former and light manufacture and agricultural processing dominant in the latter. Agriculture is concentrated in the lowland areas. In the North, almost all of the arable land is cultivated, whereas only 71 per cent is in the South. Rice is the primary crop. The Mekong River Delta is one of the world's greatest rice-producing regions. Rice is an export crop; in 1989 Viet Nam was the third largest

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<sup>9</sup> Different sources give different figures for Viet Nam's GNP in recent years, ranging from the figure cited above to US\$ 220 (SRV 1995, 1). Although it is increasingly recognized that GNP is an inaccurate indicator of development, it is still considered important by many of the institutions dominating development.

exporter of rice, a remarkable recovery from the 1984 famine where it was relying on international food aid.

### 3.2.2 Elements of Economic Renovation

Viet Nam's economic liberalization began quietly in 1979, and continued slowly throughout the 1980s. Until 1986 the Vietnamese economy was centrally planned and dominated by the state sector. It relied heavily on Soviet aid, but did not prosper or grow. In December 1986 a significant change in leadership accompanied a radical shift in economic policy that put Viet Nam on the path to an open market economy. The late 1980s saw an increasing trend toward reform. Significant economic reforms were achieved, including a foreign investment law, the liberalization of private agricultural production, the opening up of interprovincial trade, and measures to encourage private industrial activity. The Vietnamese government's definition of renovation is

transformation from a centrally planned economic system largely based on public ownership to a market oriented and multi-sectoral economy managed by the State. (SRV 1993, vii)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Viet Nam is considered to be an economy in transition. These economies are undergoing systemic change, not merely reforms, from centrally-planned to market-oriented economies. The transformation can occur on both political and economic levels, such as in the former Soviet Bloc countries, or only in economic levels, such as in Viet Nam and China. Systems change involves transforming a variety of aspects, and goes beyond merely instituting property rights. Other institutions that support a market include corporations, commercial banking, a stock market, a housing market (to encourage labour mobility), and appropriate laws. Accompanying privatisation must be the development and

Components of the reforms included decollectivizing agriculture by allocating agricultural land directly to households, opening the economy to trade and foreign investment, liberalising distribution networks, promoting domestic competition, transforming state enterprises and encouraging the growth of non-state industry, private business and trade (Lang 1994, 31; Tran and Allen 1992, 5). The household replaced the collective as the basic economic unit. A strong need for system reform, a substantial restructuring of the public sector, as well as the continuing challenge of managing a market economy was perceived. Public sector restructuring included reducing the bureaucracy and military, and closing non-essential state enterprises (Dollar 1993).<sup>11</sup>

The economic embargo imposed by the United States on Viet Nam, on the North since 1964 and the South since 1975 (Hiebert 1994a, 62), was finally lifted in early 1994. This long-awaited event had important consequences beyond expanding American investment in Viet Nam. The embargo caused more than

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implementation of incentive schemes, resource allocation mechanisms, and the re-organization of decision-making in order to produce companies that are efficient and competitive. Political change is causing havoc in the European economies in transition, but Viet Nam and China's political stability gives them a strong advantage, particularly in securing the confidence of foreign investors (Novkovic 1994). See also Ljunggren (1993), OECD (1994), Moghadam (1993), and Than and Tan (1993).

<sup>11</sup> Sources to consult on economic aspects of the ongoing transition process are the Far Eastern Economic Review, The Economist, Asiaweek, and The Vietnam Business Journal.

simply loss of trade with the U.S.; it also limited Viet Nam's access to large international commodity groups (Miner 1994) and international aid. In July 1995, the U.S. government finally extended diplomatic recognition to Viet Nam. The economic implications of that move are significant, as American companies are now allowed to do business in Viet Nam openly (instead of through foreign subsidiaries as before). Another important step in ending international isolation was joining the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), also in July 1995.

An important issue related to economic reform is that of political change and the establishment of democracy. Viet Nam and China have chosen to embrace only the economic side of market capitalism; the Eastern European states are trying to deal with a democratic transformation in addition to market reforms. This difference is generally considered to be the main reason why the Asian countries have been so much more successful than their European counterparts. Much debate exists around the necessity of accompanying democratic change. Certainly the dire problems facing Eastern Europe make a good argument for consecutive, not concurrent, transformations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Moghadam (1993) for an account of how women in Eastern Europe have suffered from the changes, both politically and economically. Women's rights are considered unimportant by the new democratic governments, and many of the social benefits they achieved under socialism have been lost.

The NICs did not adopt democratic principles in their successful industrialization.

In Viet Nam, the latest congress of the Communist Party, in July 1996, resulted in a more cautious approach to the reform process. The conservative element reasserted its authority over "every facet of Vietnamese life: economic, political and social" (Schwarz 1996c, 14). The reforms will proceed, but at a slower pace. This change of pace is the result of a power struggle between the conservative and reform elements of the government, and the hardliners "seem in the ascent" ("A difficult time" 1996, 37).

### 3.2.3 Negative Effects of Economic Renovation

The programme of economic renovation has impacted heavily on the political economy of Viet Nam. The negative impacts are felt most in the areas of the social services such as health, education, environment, women, and employment. Tran and Allen's analysis (1992) of the impact of the reforms on society raises serious questions concerning negative effects on health, education, and employment (including conditions of employment, wages and increasing unemployment), especially for women. Social and cultural policies are not keeping pace with the benefits from economic policies, according to the director of Hanoi's Centre for Women's Studies, Le Thi (cited in Church 1993). The growing gap in income is exacerbated by decreasing social assistance (Truong My Hoa cited in Church 1993). The

effects of *doi moi* on women's education are negative. Decreased spending on education is causing a decrease in the number of women enrolled in upper level primary and secondary school and tertiary education (Le Thi cited in Church 1993).

Le Thi, director of the Centre for Women's Studies, is concerned about the effect of the economic transition on family values ("Death of the Family" 1995). The family is the cornerstone of Vietnamese society, and today's high divorce rates are threatening to break the traditional patterns. Le blames the market transition for a decrease in virtue within the family and an increase in the role of money in determining relationships between family members.

The health sector has also declined since the economic reforms. Funding for health was reduced (Tran Thi Tuyet Mai cited in Church 1993). Reforms introduced user fees, legislated private practice, and the direct sale of drugs on the open market (Tran and Allen 1992, 7). Private health care for those who can afford it is growing in popularity (Seybold 1996). This move toward a two-tiered health care system has some health officials concerned that the quality of state-provided health care will decrease, even though the government is encouraging this move to take the burden off the state system.

Growing labour unrest is occurring. Workers in foreign-invested plants, especially South Korean ones, complain of maltreatment and abuse by employers (Schwarz 1996a). As

discussed in Chapter One, factories in the NIC countries treat their workers badly (Bello and Rosenfeld 1990), and many of Viet Nam's joint ventures are with companies from these countries. Viet Nam's only trade union is ineffective in dealing with the problems. The government is hindered in its attempts to increase labour standards by threats of joint venture companies to leave in search of cheaper labour, and a drop in foreign investment which could "seriously damage the country's economic prospects" (Schwarz 1996a, 21). Foreign joint-venture companies are opposing a rise in the minimum wage.

For women in the paid workforce, the reforms have meant that jobs often require a higher skill level, and women often do not have the training to make the change beneficial to them (Truong My Hoa cited in Church 1993). It is perceived by employers to be less cost-effective to hire women because of women's household responsibilities and the cost of social programs such as maternity leave (Vu Tuan Anh cited in Church 1993). Subsidies to child care are also being cut (Tran Thi Tuyet Mai cited in Church 1993).

### **3.3 The State of the Environment**

The Vietnamese people realize the importance of the environment: "In the midst of a serious economic crisis, the Vietnamese government and its people are putting environmental recovery towards the forefront of their activities" (Kemf

1990, 239). Other experts are less optimistic, however: "Vietnamese economists and environmentalists say the real underlying problem is that there is a limit to what they can do until the country reaches a higher level of economic development" (Hiebert, 3 February 1994, 24).

This section first examines the geography of Viet Nam. Next, it investigates the most significant environmental issues facing Viet Nam today, including poverty, increasing population, the aftermath of three decades of war, and an erosion of the cultural barriers against exploiting the environment. The final section considers the state of the environment, looking at water, soil, forests, and other natural resources.

### 3.3.1 Geography of Viet Nam

Viet Nam is strongly defined by its geography. It has five physical regions. Twenty-four thousand square kilometres of coastal land along 3200 kilometres of coast is low-lying and saline, unsuitable for agriculture and vulnerable to frequent tidal floods and typhoons. The poorest communities, whose chief economic activities are fishing and salt production, live along the coast (UNICEF 1990).

The deltas of the Red and Mekong rivers are the most fertile, and constitute the rice bowl of the nation. Agriculture is also practised in the central region, comprising 15 per cent of the land, although its location

makes it prone to typhoons, which limits agriculture. A mountain range runs down the entire length of the country, and the high plateaux and the mountains form over 60 per cent of the land. These areas are primarily occupied by the ethnic minorities. Agriculture is faced with loss of fertility caused by overcultivation, deforestation and soil erosion (Brazier 1992, 7), and inadequate irrigation.

### 3.3.2 Environmental Issues

From the Vietnamese point of view, population is "the most threatening danger for the environment where we are living" (Vu n.d., 5); the National Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development agrees that population is an urgent problem (SRV 1991, 75). "The excessively rapid population growth, the unequal and irrational distribution of the labor [sic] forces and natural resources exploitation sectors constitute the most complex issues in the population-environment relationship" (Vu n.d., 10). Population is not a simple issue to solve as it is related to social and economic conditions and values. Viet Nam has a high population growth rate; it was 2.2 per cent in 1993 (World Bank 1995a). Although this is less than the 2.4 per cent figure from 1990 (SRV 1991, 74) it is still far too high, and puts an "impossible strain on the environmental capacity of the country" (SRV 1991, 74).

Poverty is another environmental issue. The environmental degradation from poverty is "a serious and lasting challenge" to Viet Nam (Vu n.d., 5). Deforestation, soil degradation, erosion, unsustainable use of energy, urban expansion, and other issues will continue to increase in severity as increasing population increases the pressures on the natural environment.

The economic changes will also have profound environmental consequences, as exploitation of natural resources for economic purposes grows and pollution as a result of increased industrial activity increases.

It is impossible to present an overview of the current environmental situation in Viet Nam without constant reference to the damages suffered in thirty years of war, especially during the American war. The Vietnamese recognize well the relationship between war and environmental destruction:

Being a country that has suffered many war consequences, Viet Nam is of the view that environmental protection in general could not be disassociated with the struggle for world peace.  
(Vu n.d., 10)

The extensive use of chemical and bacteriological weapons by the Americans during the war affected all ecosystems, but especially damaged forests and agricultural lands and contaminated waters. Defoliants destroyed large areas of forest and resulted in health consequences to humans and

animals that will continue to be serious.<sup>13</sup> Over 20 000 square kilometres of land and villages, including one fifth of agricultural land, were destroyed. Today, more than 20 years after the war, Viet Nam is still recovering. Some of the world's most biologically rich and environmentally fragile forest ecosystems were turned into savannah or wasteland. Vermin now breed in these grasslands and spread disease to cattle and humans (Kemf 1999, 178). The damage from the war continues to hamper conservation efforts:

unexploded mines and bombs continue to present serious dangers to farmers, foresters and field scientists; tons of military debris still clutter vast tracts of arable land, and pernicious grass ... has taken over millions of hectares of forest and agricultural land sprayed by pesticides. (Kemf 1990, 2)

The money and effort spent repairing the ecological damage after the war could have been put toward conservation or other purposes. Thirty years of war did great damage to Viet Nam in many ways.

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<sup>13</sup> In Operation "Ranch Hand," between 1961 and 1971, 44 million litres of orange agents, 20 million litres of white agents, and 8 million litres of blue agents were sprayed over south Viet Nam (Kemf 1990, 10). In this time period, it is estimated that over two million people were living in the sprayed areas ("Special Legacy," 1995). Orange agents are the most lethal, containing dioxin levels. One millionth of a gram of dioxin can kill a person; the Agent Orange sprayed over ten per cent of south Viet Nam contained 170 kilograms of dioxin. Agent blue contains 54 per cent arsenic (Kemf 1990, 120). (The agents are all herbicides; the colours refer to the colour of the shipping containers). Agent Orange causes liver damage, still births, miscarriages, birth defects and cancer. The waters of the south will be contaminated with dioxin for generations. Studies have found increased rates of cancer and birth defects in the south (Kemf 1990).

Traditional respect for "the balance of natural forces and all living things" has been lost (1991, 27). Between the years of war and the need for survival, cultural taboos against the consumption and exploitation of natural resources have been weakened considerably. This lack of perceived inherent ecological value affects conservation efforts negatively.

### 3.3.3 State of the Environment

#### A. Water

The role of water in natural systems is essential and complex. As a result, the pollution of water takes many forms, with wide repercussions. In Viet Nam, marine resources are being depleted and polluted. Agricultural, industrial, and urban wastes are causing contamination of groundwater, lakes, rivers, and coastal waters. Coastal waters are also contaminated by pollution regions to the north of Viet Nam. Dams on major river systems, agricultural farms in coastal areas, dykes to reclaim land along the coast, the expansion of urban areas and ports, the increase of sea transport, and the expansion of oil and gas extraction have contributed to damage of varying degrees in water ecosystems (Vu n.d., 8). Water quality in rivers that pass through urban areas are seriously polluted.

The development of coastal areas has particularly severe results in terms of erosion, which is particularly dangerous

along a coastline already prone to tidal waves and typhoons. The destruction of mangrove forests, which buffer against typhoons and tidal waves, is exacerbating the vulnerability to storms, as well as causing increased intrusion of salt water into agricultural areas along the coast (Duff 1995).

Agricultural run-off from chemical fertilizers and pesticides causes serious damage to soil, water, and the health of humans and animals. Humans and animals can be affected by exposure to contaminated air or water as well as through the food chain. Insufficient consideration is given to environmental safety factors or user safety in Viet Nam (World Bank 1995b). Traditional fertilization practices using human excreta, are an unsuitable alternative, as they foster the spreading of parasitic illnesses (UNICEF 1990, 90).

In urban areas several problems associated with water pollution exist. A limited number of water pipes exist in urban areas, and none in rural. These supply networks are often in poor condition. Other sources of water can be contaminated in a variety of ways: war residues, siltation from erosion, industrial or transport pollution, improper waste disposal, untreated human waste, and salinity along the coast (UNICEF 1990, 57). Viet Nam has no functioning waste water treatment plant (World Bank 1995b, 55), and untreated industrial waste and household sewage pose critical problems.

Groundwater is becoming threatened from improper household waste disposal (UNICEF 1990, 55). In general, solid

waste is improperly collected and disposed of. No formal recycling programs exist. An extremely serious problem is the disposal of hazardous waste, with which no precautions are taken, and for which no separate facilities exist (World Bank 1995b, 59).

#### B. Soil

In a land that is heavily dependent on agriculture for its economy and lifestyle, soil quality is a significant issue. Viet Nam already has the lowest ratio of farmland to population in the world, so it can ill afford to further lose any soil quality or quantity. Yet both are being reduced, due to erosion (partly a result of deforestation), salinization, expanding urban areas, and infrastructure development. Because such a large proportion of Viet Nam is mountainous, urban expansion and roads and railways are usually built on flat, agriculturally-suitable land that is already at a premium. Salinization has already degraded one million hectares of land along the coastline. Soil quality is also decreasing due to a lack of replenishment, caused by improper or excessive use of fertilizers and pesticides, and overly-intensive farming practices. The war also caused soil quality degradation in many ways, including chemical weapons poisoning soil, land mines, clearing of forests, creating erosion.

### C. Forests

Forest is gold. If we know how to conserve it and use it well, it will be very precious.

-Ho Chi Minh (cited in Kemf 1990, 85)

Viet Nam is experiencing a crisis in deforestation. Viet Nam's foremost ecologist, Vo Quy, considers reforestation the biggest challenge facing the country since its reunification (Kemf 1990, 2).<sup>14</sup> In recent years, the forest cover has been reduced from over 40 per cent of the land to less than 28 (Kemf 1990, 2). At a rate of loss of 200 000 hectares of forest a year, Viet Nam is already below the amount of forest needed for ecological safety (Vu n.d., 5) and will have no forest cover left by the year 2000 (Vo Quy in Kemf 1990, 2).

Much of the destruction of the forests resulted from the massive use of chemical defoliants during the war, but ongoing deforestation is the result of expanding human activity.

The lives of over 35 per cent of the Vietnamese people are closely associated with forests, and for that reason alone deforestation is a serious problem. Deforestation also creates a cycle of environmental degradation that extends into floods, droughts, soil erosion, coastline collapse, and the destruction and extinction of flora and fauna. Each of these problems has further consequences.

Mangrove forests are one of Viet Nam's most important wetland ecosystems. They dominate the tropical coastal

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<sup>14</sup> See Vo Quy (1992) for further information on the recovery of Viet Nam's forests.

ecosystems, and are important economically for the inhabitants of the coastal area. Ecologically they contribute to stabilizing coastline areas, preventing erosion, and alleviating the damage of coastal storms. They are rich ecosystems of plant and animal life; they are also very delicate. Tidal mangroves were the most war-damaged ecosystem; almost half were destroyed (Kemf 1990, 134). Viet Nam's wetland ecosystems are as important as the rice areas (Vo Quy n.d.).

#### D. Other Natural Resources

Viet Nam is blessed with an abundance of natural resources, including a rich variety of flora and fauna. It possesses mineral resources, both on land and offshore. Its variety of climates and geographical features result in a high potential for biological fecundity and rich, diversified, and complex ecological systems (Vu n.d., 5).

The exploitation of mineral resources is problematic, both in terms of sustainable management -- being a non-renewable resource, no extraction method can be sustainable -- and in terms of damage to surrounding ecosystems: deforestation, erosion, pollution are common consequences. Mineral resources are economically important to Viet Nam, but Vu claims that there is considerable waste in their extraction (n.d., 9).

### 3.4 Women in Viet Nam

This section provides a description of the historical and current status of women in Viet Nam, with respect to their social, legal, work, education, and health environments. The Viet Nam Women's Union will also be examined.

Vietnamese women, like those of most Southeast Asian societies, have a relatively high status (Chipp and Green 1980, 105). Yet, while women have had high status in traditional Vietnamese society, they also suffered centuries of oppression during the Confucian feudal times. It was the socialist revolution that recognised women's role in Viet Nam and promised them equality. This promise has made a difference: in broad terms, the position of women since 1945 has increased, with the abolition of oppressive family laws, official equal status, and government programs to ensure access to education, health care and work. Viet Nam is "unlike most other countries in having enshrined women's rights at the core of its constitution" (Brazier 1992, 38). Women played a critical role in the war years, and that role has been recognised and rewarded. Nevertheless, Viet Nam remains a poor country with inadequate education and health structures; women and men both continue to suffer. Attitudes towards women's position in society have changed, although not as quickly as women's legal status. Women have not yet attained full equality, but they have made significant progress. The question now is whether the economic reforms

will encourage or threaten that progress. There is concern that the Westernization of Viet Nam will have negative effects for women.

### 3.4.1 A Woman's History of Viet Nam

Vietnamese women define their emancipation or liberation as including economic security, health, education, the opportunity to rest, equal rights and freedom from polygamy and other patriarchal traditions as well as a struggle to end the ideological and psychological subordination of women<sup>15</sup> (Eisen 1984, 8).

Prefeudal Vietnamese society had strong matriarchal aspects (Wiegersma 1988, 26); the status of women was perhaps even more equal with that of men than in the present era (Wiegersma 1988, 27).<sup>16</sup> Under feudal rule, however, women bore the double burden of being subject to their fathers, husbands, and sons, as well as their lords. Even though the

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<sup>15</sup> This conception of feminism differs from Western ones, as Eisen points out: "it does not incorporate goals ... like the texture of relations between women and men; determination of one's own sexuality, including the freedom to choose lesbianism; ... [or] the ideals of matriarchy or androgyny" (Eisen 1984, 9).

<sup>16</sup> Legends from these times portray women in strong, capable roles. The story of Viet Nam's founding tells of an equal partnership between a wife, Au Co, and her husband, Lac Long Quan. He was a dragon who lived on the coastal plains, and she was a fairy who lived in the mountains. Each were followed by half of their hundred sons, and each ruled their part of the country, separating with a pledge of mutual respect and aid in time of crisis (Eisen 1984).

male peasants generally led powerless, miserable lives, the women's lives were worse. They were responsible for all household labour, as well as planting seedlings, carrying heavy loads, working on the docks and in small scale trade (Eisen 1984, 14).

For women, Confucianism meant subordination to men, in spite of the Confucian principle of equal dignity and worth of all, regardless of their social status (Matthews 1989, 42). Filial piety is important in Confucianism, but the commitment to one's elders and ancestors has proved to be a greater constraint on women. Confucianism does not consider women to be the equals of men, or worthy of much respect outside of their roles as submissive wives and mothers. One principle states that "Men are to be respected, women despised" (Eisen 1984, 14); another states that "one hundred women are not worth a single testicle (Nguyen Huyen Chau 1988, 70). One of the basic tenets of Confucianism is the "three obediences" required of women: women must obey their father until marriage, then their husband, and as widows, their eldest son. Eisen (1984, 15) considers this as "patriarchy in its purest form."

Confucian marriage was particularly oppressive to women. Polygamy was an institution, one "designed to exploit women's labour" as marrying several women or keeping concubines was cheaper than employing servants (Eisen 1984, 14). There were other ways in which polygamy exploited women. They were

considered property, and their freedom was severely curtailed. Marriages were arranged, giving women no choice. Child marriage was permitted. Large families were valued -- "happy is the man who has a large family" -- and male children were valued considerably more than female children (Nguyen Huyen Chau 1988, 70).

Buddhism, the other major cultural influence in Viet Nam, is less oppressive towards women than Confucianism. In the Buddhist countries of Asia "[w]omen are more independent and free, and lead active lives" (Matsui 1989, 100). According to a Thai scholar Chatsumarn Kabilsingh, "Buddhism is the first religion in the world to establish a community of ordained women on the basis that women can achieve equal salvation with men" (cited in Matsui 1989, 100). Nevertheless, discrimination against women still exists. Within the Buddhist concept of karma, the belief that one's actions in a previous life determine one's place in this life, there is the belief that to be born a woman means that "there was an inadequate store of merit in her previous lives" and as a consequence women's social and economic status is lower (Hantrakul in Matsui 1989, 101).

Historically, Vietnamese women's legal status was ambiguous. Confucian ethics gave women low status in both family and society. For example, a wife could be repudiated by her husband for any of the following reasons: barrenness, lasciviousness, refusal to serve and obey her parents-in-law,

quarrelsomeness, thievery, jealousy, and incurable disease (Ta 1988, 114). A woman's social status was defined by her husband's.

However, the legal system of the Le Code of the 15th century which represented Vietnamese custom, gave women equal civil rights, although it maintained a lower status in the family. Husbands had a duty to love and respect their wife/wives. Women had equal inheritance rights and widows equal property rights. French colonial authorities upheld the misogynist Confucian laws.

In spite of women's oppression during many centuries of feudalism, some women did manage to gain power and become heroes whose praises are still sung today. The Trung sisters and Trieu Au<sup>17</sup> offer a good contrast to the picture of women suffering under Confucianism, for the strength and courage of these women was probably present in most women, struggling for dignity in their everyday lives.

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<sup>17</sup> Two sisters, Trung Trac and Trung Nhi led an insurrection against the Chinese invaders in 40 CE. Their army of 80 000 and 38 woman generals successfully defeated the Chinese, and the sisters ruled the country for three years. Two hundred years later, a 21 year old peasant woman, Trieu Thi Trinh led a rebellion against the Chinese. Her words to her brother became celebrated and passed down through generations of women:

I want only to ride the wind and walk the waves,  
 slay the big whale of the 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  
 housework? (cited in Bui Thi Lan 1994, 51)

During the French and American wars, women participated fully in the war effort, involved not only in support activities, but also in the fighting. Their equal participation at the side of the men elevated their status in society. They proved that women could do the same work as men. They entered the workforce and held leadership and management positions. According to UNICEF, women "proved more than their worth" in their contribution to the national economy during the war, and their emancipation "is actively promoted and they are encouraged and facilitated to work outside the home" (UNICEF 1990, 160).

#### 3.4.2 Women's Current Status

Today, Vietnamese women enjoy equality to men in law. Women in Vietnam were promised emancipation by the Communist Party, and in Viet Nam's first constitution (1946), Article 9 states that

All power in the country belongs to the Vietnamese people, irrespective of race, sex, fortune, class, religion

and that

Women are equal to men in all respects (cited in Tran and Allen 1992, 10).

The Law on Marriage and Family legally defines women's status. Its main provisions are complete freedom of marriage and divorce for women as well as men; a monogamous society; women and men are equal partners in all aspects of family life including property and custody; and interdiction of physical

violence against women and children. It also dictates that in a divorce, women's non-salaried work in the household is given monetary value, and it forbids discrimination against adopted or illegitimate children, or girls. Between the equality of the constitution and the provisions of the Law on Marriage and Family, women have, in theory, a fairly equitable status in society.<sup>18</sup>

However, as has been the case in other countries, there is a difference between *de jure* and *de facto* status. Thousands of years of tradition cannot be legislated out of everyday existence in just a decade or two. Discriminatory attitudes remain. Vietnamese women still face discrimination in their lives. SIDA gives examples of the discrepancy between the law and social tradition (Tran and Allen 1992). In a society with a strong Confucian basis, there are barriers to achieving equality between women and men (Tran and Allen 1992, 11). For example, few women receive help from their husbands in household work, including child care. Sons continue to be valued more and therefore treated differently than daughters.

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<sup>18</sup> Ta also describes "positive discrimination" in the form of special protective measures for women (129). Female criminal offenders are treated more leniently in many respects than men. Women also receive protection within the family relationship. Although these provisions benefit women, and perhaps correct historical wrongs, they are still discriminatory, and it could be argued that they accentuate the perception of woman's weaker nature.

The family forms the basis of social organization in Viet Nam, although membership in one's village or ethnic group is also central (UNICEF 1990, 9). The implications of such a social structure for women have been oppressive when combined with Confucian values. Recently, the structures of the extended family structure are slowly being eroded, especially in urban areas. Demographic change, housing congestion, and economic pressures are responsible, and as Viet Nam becomes more open to Western culture, the traditional social structures will presumably be altered even more, especially in urban areas. The already growing difference between rural and urban culture will be exacerbated with growing income inequality and Western influence in large cities. This will impact on women's lives, as their roles as mothers, housekeepers, and workers change, and sometimes conflict.

Vietnamese women work both inside and outside of the home. In 1989, 71.7 per cent of women engaged in paid work. In rural areas, in addition to agricultural work, women participate in "sideline activities" such as handicrafts, animal husbandry, gardening, and trading to supplement the household income. In urban areas, the majority of women work outside the home. Assisting in the housework is considered unsuitable for men.

Physically demanding jobs, scientific, and government jobs are dominated by men. Women's work, in addition to housework and child rearing, includes menial heavy work,

activities requiring fine motor skills, and teaching elementary school, hospital work, selling goods and food, and service work in hotels and restaurants (Tran and Allen 1992, 14).

Unemployment is increasing as a result of the economic reforms since 1990; women are at higher risk of losing their jobs because they have more lower-level jobs, are "likely to have had breaks in their employment for childbirth, and less likely to have invested much time in the informal socio-political network (Tran and Allen 1992, 16).

Vietnamese have always valued education and learning highly, a characteristic inherited from Confucianism. Alexander Woodside considers Viet Nam "one of the most literate civilizations on the face of the planet" (cited in Rubin 1988, 43). During the feudal and colonial periods, however, learning was restricted to a small elite of men, as women were considered unworthy of education (Eisen 1984, 216). In 1945, the illiteracy rate was over 95 per cent (UNESCO 1989, 19). Ho Chi Minh also valued education, and since 1945 education for both girls and boys, especially basic literacy, has been a high priority (Tran and Allen 1992, 9).

Literacy is considered an important statistical measure of education levels in a country, and is an indicator of development (UNDP 1995). Viet Nam has had a high literacy

rate of over 85 per cent, in recent years.<sup>19</sup> Viet Nam compared favourably to other Asian nations in a 1985 Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) survey in 1985 (MOET 1992). However, literacy has declined since the economic changes of the late 1980s (Tran and Allen 1992, 10), due in part to decreased education subsidies (Le Thi cited in Church 1993).

Education of women is essential to women achieving equality (Eisen 1984, 216). It is also linked to child health and children's intellectual development (Vickers 1991, 27). Tran and Allen's 1992 analysis of women's education concluded that women do not have equal access to education as men. The deterioration in educational services is expected to affect girls more than boys. Economic pressures also hinder girls' access to schools; if a family can only afford to educate one child, the boy will be given that privilege (Tran and Allen 1992, 10). However, the government's strong encouragement of one-child families may have a positive effect on girls' education in future years.

In Viet Nam, health care is free and a right of the people. Nevertheless, infectious diseases and poor nutrition are Viet Nam's leading health problems (Tran and Allen 1992, 7). Among children, malaria is the main source of mortality,

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<sup>19</sup> The literacy rate was 84.4 per cent in 1985 (MOET 1992, 5), 94 per cent in 1989 (*Encyclopedia* 1992, 2096) and 88 per cent in 1990 (World Bank 1995a). The discrepancy between the figures can be attributed to different methods of data collection and analysis, and we would want to use the same assumptions to measure whether recent education policies are already leading to a decline in literacy rates.

and of the ten leading causes of morbidity and mortality among children are communicable diseases, most of which are both preventable and exacerbated by poor nutrition during pregnancy (UNICEF 1990, 62). Over 50 per cent of children between one and five years are affected by stunting or chronic malnutrition (UNICEF 1990, 108). UNICEF achieved its immunization goal of 80 per cent of the country's children by 1990 (79). Cholera, trachoma and smallpox epidemics have been eradicated (UNESCO 1989, 29). Infant mortality dropped from 156/1000 in 1965 to 41/1000 in 1993 (World Bank 1995a). Life expectancy at birth has risen. Women's life expectancy rose from 60 years in 1975 to 68 in 1984 (UNESCO 1989, 30).

Women's health and reproductive rights have improved since 1975 (Eisen 1984, 201). The law for Protection of Public Health of 1989 includes a section on women's rights to gynaecological care as well as a stricture against "employ[ing] female labour in heavy jobs and jobs harmful to health" (UNICEF 1990, 94).<sup>20</sup> The Women's Union also plays an

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<sup>20</sup> UNICEF does not indicate whether other aspects of women's health are addressed in this law. It also does not provide analysis on the implications of the protection of women from heavy and harmful labour; this could be viewed as either employment discrimination, or a positive health benefit for women. Much rests on how "heavy" and "harmful" are defined; women still work in the rice fields, planting, weeding and harvesting rice which involves much bending leading to permanent back damage. In certain stages of rice cultivation, workers stand in knee-deep water containing pesticides. When I was in Viet Nam I saw some things that led me to doubt how well this law is enforced. I only saw women cleaning the street at night, a labour-intensive job; and many women working in unsafe conditions in construction jobs, as well as women in the rice fields.

important role in women's and children's health (UNESCO 1989, 19).

In the area of family planning, "women remain sexually subordinated -- not only in relation to their husbands, but also in relation to the policies which first sought to increase female labor [sic] productivity to meet the requirements of the war effort, and then sought to control their reproductive behaviour to meet national economic targets" (Nguyen Huyen Chau 1988, 73). Patriarchal power structures deny women control over their fertility and reproduction.

#### 3.4.3 The Viet Nam Women's Union

The Viet Nam Women's Union, founded in 1930, is a mass organization that represents women of all social strata. Its purposes are to "take care of and protect the legitimate and legal rights and interests of women" and to "create conditions for women to realize equality and development" (Vietnam Women's Union n.d.). In the past, the Union supported and mobilized women in their struggle against foreign imperialism and national liberation. Membership is open to all women over 16; in 1982, the Union had over nine million members. It has its own publishing house, magazine, and radio and television programmes. It provides a "powerful vehicle for Vietnamese women to define their goals and fight for them" (Eisen 1984, 136).

The Women's Union is based at the village level, but works at village, state and national levels. It is involved in education and health, family planning, income generation and employment, child care, child raising, and domestic violence issues in communities.

The Women's Union represents women to the government. It is influential in the National Assembly, and active in defending women's rights, designing new laws and ensuring the implementation of policies to protect women. It also works with ministries, agencies, and local authorities in areas affecting women and children.

### **3.5 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter has established a better understanding of the process of the economic renovation, and its social, cultural and environmental context. This background leads to a clearer understanding of the potential future consequences of continued reform. The future of Viet Nam's plan for economic renovation and development, as well as the nature of its sustainability, are evaluated further in the next chapter. The focus will shift from analysis of secondary sources to an analysis of government policy.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **ANALYSIS OF VIETNAMESE POLICY WITH RESPECT TO DEVELOPMENT, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, AND WOMEN**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

##### **4.1.1 Structure of Chapter**

Continuing to build on the three themes of the thesis, this chapter analyses the nature of Viet Nam's policy with respect to development, sustainable development, and women. The discussion will be based on three documents written by the Vietnamese government: Vietnam: A Development Perspective (SRV 1993) explains Viet Nam economic development strategy; the National Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development (SRV 1991) outlines a plan for environmental conservation and environmentally sustainable development, and Vietnam's Country Report to the Fourth World Conference on Women (SRV 1995) summarizes the status of women in Viet Nam and strategies for the advancement of women. I will use the criteria developed by the Brundtland Commission, mentioned in Chapter Two, to

determine to what extent sustainable development is articulated in these documents.

I have chosen to analyze these documents because they address the three themes of this thesis, namely development, sustainable development, and women. They outline general government policy, providing an opportunity to ascertain the underlying philosophy and assumptions of the government. They are forward-looking, and provide a method of evaluating the explicit policy direction of Viet Nam.

I will begin by providing a general overview of each of these documents on policy and describe briefly their points of intersection. Next I discuss my reasons for using the Brundtland Commission and its objectives for sustainable development for this analysis. I will then apply each of its seven objectives to the Vietnamese policy documents.

#### 4.1.2 Introduction to the Policy Documents

##### A. The Report on Development (A Development Perspective)

Vietnam: A Development Perspective outlines Viet Nam's development strategy for both short-term and long-term. The document is based on the 1991 Socio-Economic Stabilization and Development Strategy to the Year 2000, adopted by the Seventh National Congress of the Communist Party. This strategy is Viet Nam's official development plan. A Development Perspective, prepared for a donor conference, outlines economic priorities, goals, and strategies.

In the forward to A Development Perspective, Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet summarizes the continuing goals of the reform programme, which are the restructuring of the state enterprise sector, improving the market mechanism, developing an open economy and reforming the legal system (ii).

Viet Nam's development strategy, as outlined in A Development Perspective, has eight key components, most of which are economic in nature. They are:

- Investing in people
- The commitment to sustainable development and protecting the environment
- Strengthening investment, savings and efficient resource allocation
- An outward oriented trade policy
- Building on comparative advantage and sectoral strengths
- Targeting public sector investment to maximum development
- Strengthening science and technology development
- Adaptability in implementation of the development strategy

#### B. The Report on Sustainable Development (NPESD)

In 1991 the Vietnamese government approved a plan that was designed by the State Committee for the Sciences in conjunction with four international agencies (UNDP, UNEP, IUCN, and SIDA). The National Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development, A Framework for Action (hereafter

referred to as the NPESD) delineates environmental priorities, and a framework for solutions.<sup>1</sup> The report aims to

provide for the gradual development of a comprehensive framework for national and sub-national environmental planning and management; and

lead to specific actions that are required in the short term to address priority problems at their very roots. (5)

Its implementation plan is divided into two five-year periods; the highest priority is given to management components, population control programmes, watershed management programmes and estuary protection. Priorities for the latter half of the decade include continued population control and watershed management as well as the protection of reefs, wetlands and inland waters.

The document is organized into four chapters addressing background information; an institutional, legislative, and policy framework; action programmes; and program support activities. It also includes a natural resources and environment map, and several annexes providing further supplementary information.

This document is preliminary; it recognises that "more work will be needed" (23). Many of its strategies are only broadly described, yet it provides an opportunity to analyze current policy and thinking about sustainable development.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1985, the Council of Ministers passed a resolution on "Activities on Basic Investigation, Rational Utilization of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection" which laid the foundation for further policies for environmental protection, including the NPESD.

The goals of "sustainable development with equity" (6), the theme of the National Plan of Environment and Sustainable Development, are twofold:

To satisfy the basic material, spiritual and cultural needs of all the people of Vietnam, both present and future generations, through the wise management of natural resources

and

To define and establish policies, action plans, and institutional structures to ensure that the sustainability of natural resource use will be fully intergraded [sic] into all aspects of Vietnam's social and economic development process.

Objectives in achieving these goals are to:

-maintain essential ecological processes and life-support systems upon which the human welfare in Vietnam is dependent

-maintain Vietnam's wealth of genetic diversity of both domesticated and wild species of current and potential benefit

-ensure the sustainable use of Vietnam's natural resources by managing intensity and patterns of use

-maintain overall environmental quality, necessary for the well being of human existence

-achieve a population level and distribution that is in balance with natural sustainable productivity at a dignified standard of living.

### C. The Report on Women (ROW)

Viet Nam's Country Report to the Fourth World Conference on Women "For Equality, Development and Peace" (hereafter referred to as the ROW) was written for the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995. It is a summary of the government position on women, and contains

two main sections: "The Situation and Role of Vietnamese Women in the Socio-economic Development of the Country and their Participation in State Management" and "Development Strategies for the Advancement of Vietnamese Women to the Year 2000." It also contains a short summary of Viet Nam's role at the Beijing conference.

The information in the first section has already been discussed in Chapter Three. The relevance of the report to this chapter lies in its strategies for the advancement of women, which are based on the issues discussed at the Beijing conference. These strategies are to:

- create job opportunities and income-generation activities for women and alleviate poverty
- provide women equal access to literacy programmes. Improve the educational level of women in all areas
- improve health care services for women
- enhance women's role and status in leadership mechanisms, consultations and decision-making
- protect women's rights, interests and dignity; eliminate every form of violation of women's human rights and discrimination against women
- enhance the role of the family
- develop women's role in the management of the environment and natural resources, contribute to the sustainable development and to the improvement of the living conditions
- increase information and communication in order to raise public awareness on gender equality
- contribute to preserve and strengthen peace
- enhance the capacity of the functional apparatus for the advancement of women in Vietnam.

Each strategy is followed by more concrete objectives to be achieved by the year 2000. These objectives correspond to the needs for improvement that come out of previous analysis of the situation of women, and also reflect the government's attempts to implement the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies<sup>2</sup>, which are to be implemented by the year 2000. Some of the objectives relate to a general increase in the standard of living and alleviation of poverty that is needed, but most are specific to women.

Many of the mechanisms suggested by the ROW to achieve these goals are structural, and the government is given a central role in their implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Because the ROW does not focus on economic development or sustainable development, it does not fit into the structure of this chapter as well as the other two documents. This is an indication of a weakness in the vision informing the policy; the Vietnamese government's policy on women, economic development, and environment is not fully integrated.

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<sup>2</sup> CEDAW came into effect in 1981 and has been ratified by 103 countries (Connelly 1993, 196). The Forward Looking Strategies (FLS) for the Advancement of Women are the resolutions from the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the UN Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace held in Nairobi in 1985. Dankelman and Davidson (1988) describe the conference and the FLS in more detail.

#### D. Points of Intersection

I will now examine to what extent the documents refer to the themes of the others. Both A Development Perspective and the NPESD were written well before the Beijing Conference, and thus do not refer to it. Nevertheless, Viet Nam is also a signatory to CEDAW and the FLS; a strong commitment to women would be indicated by referring to these in all of the documents. However, only the ROW mentions them.

Neither the NPESD nor A Development Perspective mention the needs of women or the role of women in environmental management and sustainable development, and in the economic transition and economic development. The NPESD does not elaborate on the implications of its theme of "sustainable development with equity" but the use of "equity" suggests some commitment to equality between men and women, as well as equality in other forms.

Agenda 21, the plan of action from the UNCED Conference, is a significant international environmental document to which Viet Nam is a signatory. A Development Perspective affirms the Vietnamese government's commitment to Agenda 21. The ROW does not mention it. The NPESD was written before the UNCED Conference.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> No other relevant UN conferences (such as the World Summit for Social Development or the International Conference on Population and Development or earlier conferences such as the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment or the UN Habitat Conference) are mentioned in any of the three Vietnamese documents.

A Development Perspective discusses sustainable development, but only in a secondary way. The primary model that the document follows is an orthodox market and growth oriented economy; environmental issues are given only a small role; much more space is given to market mechanisms. In the ROW, although sustainable development is one of the ten strategies, the model of sustainable development is not fully articulated and it does not appear to be a priority.

All three documents address economic development. Obviously, that is the main theme of A Development Perspective. The NPESD and the ROW pay more attention to economic development than any of the documents do to a non-dominant theme.

This preliminary look at what extent the policy documents address each of the three themes of economic development, sustainable development, and women, has shown that there is a lack of integration in the vision informing them. Also, it appears that ecological and women's concerns are subordinated to economic development, as that is the one strand the documents agree on most. Having introduced the policy documents I will be using, and briefly examined their points of intersection, I will now introduce the criteria with which I will analyze them.

#### 4.1.3 The Brundtland Guidelines for Sustainable Development

I will use the guidelines for sustainable development put forth by the Brundtland Commission (sometimes referred to as "the Commission") to analyze Viet Nam's policy documents. I decided to use these objectives because they are generally accepted international standards. The Brundtland Commission's strength lies in the political credibility that it has achieved by searching for a model of sustainable development that is politically acceptable. The Brundtland Commission's formulation of sustainable development has, in fact, been "the most influential formulation of this concept to date" (Jacob 1994, 237).

The Brundtland Commission's "[c]ritical objectives for environment and development policies" are reiterated here. I will explain them in more detail as I apply them to the Vietnamese context below.

- 1 reviving growth
- 2 changing the quality of growth
- 3 meeting essential needs for jobs, food, energy, water and sanitation
- 4 ensuring a sustainable level of population
- 5 conserving and enhancing the resource base
- 6 reorienting technology and managing risk
- 7 merging environment and economics in decision-making (WCED 1987, 49)

These goals reflect the interconnected nature of the elements of sustainable development. For example, eliminating poverty is related to several objectives: reviving and changing the nature of growth, meeting essential needs, and population.

## **4.2.2 Reviving Growth**

### **4.2.1 The Brundtland Perspective**

The Brundtland Commission considers reviving economic growth to be the highest priority on the path to achieving sustainable development. A revival and increase in economic growth is necessary to counter the stagnating or declining growth trends of the 1980s which resulted in increasing poverty. The Commission suggests five percent as an appropriate growth rate for Asian countries (50).

Growth is crucial because it is seen as the means to eliminating poverty (1, 49), and eliminating poverty, according to the Commission, is a fundamental element of sustainable development because "poverty reduces people's capacity to use resources in a sustainable manner" thus intensifying pressure on the environment (49). Elements of the link between poverty and environmental degradation have already been discussed in Chapter Two.

### **4.2.2 Viet Nam's Perspective**

Viet Nam places a high value on economic growth; indeed, its economic reforms were meant to revive and foster growth. In the early 1990s, its average growth rate was seven per cent<sup>4</sup> (SRV 1993, ii) and the government plans to continue or even increase this trend. According to the 1991 development

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<sup>4</sup> Or larger: in 1996, Viet Nam's GDP growth rate was given as averaging 8.2 per cent in the five years through 1995 (Schwarz 1995, 15).

strategy, Viet Nam's overreaching goals are stabilization and the doubling of the 1990 GNP by the year 2000 (ii). Economic stabilization is considered to be a necessary condition for the desired levels of economic growth. Most of A Development Perspective is devoted to addressing this goal and the processes by which to achieve it.

The Vietnamese government considers economic growth to be a vehicle to improve the welfare of the Vietnamese people (ii). Poverty is one of the major obstacles in Viet Nam's development, and A Development Perspective links its "overarching goals" to improving living standards and reducing poverty and malnutrition (8). The analysis in this document understands the link between poverty and environment (viii, 28) but that link is not the main focus of the development strategy. The document does not discuss the elimination of poverty, however, only its reduction.

The NPESD does not directly address the issue of growth, which is a serious oversight, as the plans for environmental management are situated in the context of market reform, and the economic policy has the potential to clash with the goals put forth by the NPESD. It does address poverty and the necessity of satisfying essential material needs (7); also it addresses various economic sectors such as agriculture (8) and industry (11), which will be where economic growth will happen. It also addresses the issue of funding for its goals,

which is tied to economic growth, as a source of revenue generation.

In the ROW, the government's commitment to economic growth as a vital part of the social development process is reaffirmed. Women are considered to have an important role in the economic growth and development process, and they are considered to be benefactors of this (18). The report does not go into much detail on growth.

Viet Nam's growth rate exceeds the Brundtland objective for reviving growth. The Brundtland report does not indicate if a growth rate higher than recommended is still good, so it is hard to say whether Viet Nam meets this objective exactly. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese recognition of the need for economic growth, and the relation of growth to reducing poverty, is congruent with the Brundtland objective on increasing growth.

### **4.3 Changing the Quality of Growth**

#### **4.3.1 The Brundtland Perspective**

While the Commission argues that reviving growth is critical for eliminating poverty, it suggests that the nature of this growth is relevant to sustainable development. Sustainable economic growth must be less material-intensive and energy-intensive, and must be "more soundly based upon the realities of the stock of capital that sustains it" (52). It must consider the quantity and condition of natural resources

it is based on. Accounting systems must include measurement of the improvement or decline of natural resources.

A sustainable economic system must be less vulnerable to crises, both natural and market-based, as crises tend to cause overexploitation of resources. Vulnerability is reduced by "using technologies that lower production risks, by choosing institutional options that reduce market fluctuations, and by building up reserves, especially of food and foreign exchange" (53).

Distribution of income and wealth is important to sustainable development: "rapid growth combined with deteriorating income distribution may be worse than slower growth combined with redistribution in favour of the poor" (52), because poverty increases the stresses on the environment. Social and economic development should be mutually reinforcing (54). Meeting basic human needs and reducing alienation and marginalization among a country's people are part of sustainable development.

Finally, sustainable growth must take a long-term view, not the short-term profit oriented view common to orthodox economics.

#### 4.3.2 Viet Nam's Perspective

While Viet Nam is avidly promoting growth, it is not significantly changing the quality of growth to make it more sustainable. As discussed in Chapter Three, its goal is

liberal market economics; a system that does not take notice of the ecological restraints, as indicated in Chapter Two. None of the policy documents address changing the quality of growth in an adequate manner.

The NPESD does not address the difficulty of reconciling growth and sustainability. It states that "if maximum economic growth is the will of the people, pricing mechanisms would be introduced to tackle environmental problems by making the polluter pay for the pollution, so that the cost of resources are regulated by the market" (11). Market control over the environment is a trap. The market mechanism does not regulate sustainable use of resources; it promotes their short-sighted exploitation.

According to the NPESD, the form of socio-economic development that Viet Nam follows should be the choice of the people. While this democratic principle is praiseworthy, it holds great danger when people's choices are constructed by advertisement and the market and people's needs are constructed as consumable commodities. An extensive education campaign will be necessary to inform people of the issues surrounding sustainable development, but from where will that initiative come, as the government encourages "market forces"? There is no guarantee that the Vietnamese people are prepared to choose what will be a more difficult option, as the lures of the market are tempting.

Social development is named a priority in both the NPESD and A Development Perspective. However, in the summary of recommended actions by sector in the NPESD, a trend emerges that economic considerations -- particularly those relating to the market -- are usually the first to be mentioned, and social considerations are often last. This implies that social considerations are given lesser priority than economic ones, reinforcing the orthodox model of development.

A Development Perspective admits that the economic transition will result in "marked regional variations in per capita income and social amenities (viii). It does not explain how it will address the growing social inequality that a market system will bring. The NPESD also does not address income inequality explicitly, although its goal of "sustainable development with equity" could be interpreted to include equitable distribution of income and/or resources.

A Development Perspective sets up a market model. It does not envision an accounting system that includes environmental considerations. The NPESD does not discuss economic details. Reducing vulnerability is not explicitly addressed in either document. This point is discussed further in section 4.7.2 below.

The ROW does not address changing the nature of growth in terms of sustainable development. It calls for integrating women's concerns into national development programmes (19), which could potentially change the nature of growth, but not

necessarily in any more environmentally sustainable manner. The report does not discuss income distribution, accounting systems, or reducing vulnerability. It has long-term goals, but does not discuss long-term sustainability.

On the whole, Vietnamese government policy does not consider the need to change the nature of growth a very high priority, although it acknowledges it in the objectives for sustainable development mentioned above. Given its plans for rapid growth, this omission is disturbing. High growth rates are not sustainable if the growth remains based on an economic system that exploits its resources.

#### **4.4 Meeting Essential Needs**

##### **4.4.1 The Brundtland Perspective**

Meeting essential needs is an obvious but fundamental aspect of sustainable development. According to the Commission, "The principal development challenge is to meet the needs and aspirations of an expanding developing world population" (54). The meeting of essential human needs is also central to poverty elimination. Among the basic needs that sustainable development must ensure are food, energy, housing, water supply, sanitation, health care, and employment, "the most basic of all needs" (54).

#### 4.4.2 Viet Nam's Perspective

The Vietnamese government recognizes the importance of meeting the essential needs of its people as an crucial component of its development strategy, but it does not explicitly link this analysis to sustainability. "Investing in people" is the first component of Viet Nam's development strategy (SRV 1993, 39). The sectors that the government will focus on in this component include education and training, health and nutrition, water supply and sanitation, housing, and labour. All of these are included as the basic needs called for by the Brundtland Commission.

In the NPESD, water and sanitation are priority issues. Improving "quality of life" and increasing standards of living in a sustainable manner are considered important. Social medical services, population control, waste disposal, and controls for emission of pollutants are all aspects of this goal.

The ROW also recognizes the importance of meeting essential needs, especially women's essential needs. Education and health for women and children are priorities. Including women in income generating activities and representing women in leadership and management roles are objectives that are related to increasing employment among women. Improving the living standard of women and implementing safe drinking water programmes are important

elements of sustainable development, according to the report (24).

Thus, Viet Nam's policy on basic needs is basically congruent with the Brundtland objectives, although unlike the Brundtland Commission, employment is not considered an overarching aspect of meeting basic needs in any of the policy documents.

#### **4.5 Ensuring a Sustainable Level of Population**

##### **4.5.1 The Brundtland Perspective**

Population size and growth rate are closely related to sustainable development. To achieve sustainable development, a country's population should be "stabilized at a level consistent with the productive capacity of the ecosystem" (56). Population is both a global and a regional issue, and is more complex than a simple formula. In the global context, people in rich countries place a greater burden on the Earth's resources than people in poorer countries. Thus, Western countries with lower population growth rates are not necessarily more sustainable than poor countries with rapidly growing populations.

Reducing population growth is directly linked to economic and social development. Improvement of living standards must be integral to population policies, as well as direct measures to control fertility.

The Commission also discusses the growing urbanization that accompanies rapid population expansion. An uneven urban-rural split, and a decreasing rural population have significant consequences for sustainable development, and pose serious environmental and social challenges.

#### 4.5.2 Viet Nam's Perspective

The NPESD considers overpopulation to be Viet Nam's single most serious environmental problem (74). Its goal is to achieve a population level and distribution that is in balance with natural sustainable productivity at a dignified standard of living. It urges reducing population growth to zero as soon as possible (80), as the current annual growth rate of 2.4 per cent is placing an "impossible strain on the environment" (74).

Since 1988, the government has encouraged population control measures including a maximum of two children per family, spaced between three and five years apart, and a minimum age for parenthood (22 for women; 24 for men) (74). The National Committee for Population and Family Planning provides family planning services, including education and communication to increase awareness (75). The NPESD's analysis of population includes an awareness of the connections between population and other social factors. They understand the need for a cross sector review and continuing studies in family planning policy.

The analysis of population in A Development Perspective is less well developed than that of the NPESD, and it is not linked to sustainable development, but the issue is addressed. Reducing population growth is one of the objectives that support the overall goal of improving the standard of living of the Vietnamese people. The government wants to reduce population growth to 1.7 per cent by the year 2000, by an intensification of the population and family planning programme (10). The only other mention of population in this document is a section on health and population (41). Better family planning and a reduction of the birth rate will decrease the strain on the health care system.

In the ROW, population is discussed under the category of health care, and a reduction of the population rate, to 2.9 children per couple,<sup>5</sup> is suggested as a way to increase the well-being of mothers and children and to enable mothers to "teach their children good behavior [sic]" (21). A sustainable level of population is not mentioned, in fact, no connection is drawn between population and environmental issues.

The NPESD and A Development Perspective are also aware of the issues of urbanization and the social and environmental problems associated with growing urban populations. They

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<sup>5</sup> The Beijing report does not give a figure on the population growth rate that is compatible with the format of the other figures cited in this thesis. 2.9 children per couple should not be interpreted to mean a 2.9 per cent growth rate.

propose solutions for this issue as well. The ROW does not mention urbanization.

In conclusion, the goals of the Vietnamese government are congruent overall with the Brundtland objective for reducing population, although the understanding of the issues in A Development Perspective and the ROW are weak.

#### **4.6 Conserving and Enhancing the Resource Base**

##### **4.6.1 The Brundtland Perspective**

The conservation and enhancement of the global resource base is crucial. Degradation of resources -- agricultural, air, water, and others -- by overuse or pollution must be stopped, and renewable resources must be allowed to recover from this degradation. Sustainable management of natural resources is related to issues of poverty, income, and the nature of growth. Our obligation in this goes beyond development issues to a moral obligation to "other living beings and future generations (57). Conservation and enhancement of resources will require significant policy changes to address high levels of consumption in the industrialized countries, increasing consumption levels in developing countries and population growth.

Agricultural, fishing and forest resources are being overextended in many parts of the world, and the result is erosion, degradation of soils, deforestation, stock depletion, poisoning of soils and food with pesticides, and other

negative consequences that ultimately affect people's lives and livelihoods. Both the limited supply of energy and the reduction of pollution from energy production are crucial issues. Renewable energy sources must be managed in a sustainable manner, and reliance on non-renewable fossil fuels must be reduced. Energy must be used more efficiently in all aspects of production. Mineral resources must be conserved because they are non-renewable. The reduction and prevention of air and water pollution caused by fertilizer and pesticide use, urban sewage, fossil fuel burning, chemicals, and other industrial activities must be addressed.

#### 4.6.2 Viet Nam's Perspective

In A Development Perspective, better management of the environment to use resources more efficiently is considered to be "both a moral responsibility, and sound economics" (x). More emphasis is, however, placed on economics in the body of the report. The section on renewable natural resources focuses on the present and potential economic significance of the resources more than it does on mending the damage of environmental degradation in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry (14, 15). In the section on energy and minerals, there is no mention of sustainable extraction or use of minerals, although the environmental dangers of coal mining are referred to in passing. No reference to alternative energy is made; the focus is on hydroelectricity to serve

industrial needs and job creation" (16). The environmental hazards of hydroelectricity, and a sustainable energy policy, are not considered.

The NPESD pledges to ensure the sustainable use of Vietnam's natural resources by managing intensity and patterns of use. It calls for the maintenance of "essential ecological processes and life-support systems upon which the human welfare in Vietnam is dependent;" of "Viet Nam's wealth of genetic diversity of both domesticated and wild species of current and potential benefit;" and of "overall environmental quality, necessary for the well being of human existence" (6).

However, it contains contradictory statements. One example is that it gives "[h]igh priority ... to develop[ing] the mineral exploitation sectors" (47), an unsustainable practice as mineral resources are non-renewable and therefore have a finite supply. Non-renewable resource extraction is not only ecologically unsustainable, but also economically; building a sector of the economy on a resource that won't be around in a few years is not foresighted.

Another example is that the first action for agriculture is "intensified cultivation to enhance productivity" (8). Intensified agriculture often relies on chemical pesticides and fertilizers; instead, Viet Nam should be seeking an integrated pest management and fertilizer system that would emphasize intercropping, crop rotation, natural pesticides and

fertilizers, and other traditional agricultural pest and fertilizer methods (Friesen 1992, 12).

The ROW proposes that women should play a role in the environmental management, but is vague on exactly what women's roles should be. Education and training are suggested as priority actions. The report also reaffirms Viet Nam's commitment to the NPESD.

In conclusion, commitment to resource conservation is made by the Vietnamese government, but the depth of the commitment and the ability of the government to implement it is uncertain.

#### **4.7 Reorienting Technology and Managing Risk**

##### **4.7.1 The Brundtland Perspective**

Technology, the "key link between humans and nature" (60), must be reoriented so that developing countries' capacity for technological innovation is increased, technology transfers from North to South are appropriate, and technological innovation is reoriented to environmental, not market, needs. Technology is essential to developing sustainability because it can provide the means for better conservation techniques, reduction of pollution, more efficient use of energy and other resources, and solutions to other environmental problems.

Risk management is another component of sustainable development, because it reduces the potential for catastrophe

in complex energy (including nuclear), communications, and transportation systems, and catastrophes always have negative environmental consequences. Risk management also reduces the stress of such systems on the environment by making them more efficient.

#### 4.7.2 Viet Nam's Perspective

A Development Perspective addresses technology but not in the context of sustainable development. "Strengthening science and technology development" is one of the aspects of the proposed development strategy (70). The government wants to overcome its perceived "rudimentary" level of scientific/technological expertise and catch up to international standards, strengthening all economic sectors, although agriculture is given a priority. There is only brief mention of the desirability of appropriate technology and the avoidance of importing "outdated and environmentally harmful technology" (71). These points are important and deserve more consideration.

Technological solutions do not play a major role in the NPESD. The plan is more focused on management than technology, although there is some discussion of the need for technology for waste reduction, waste treatment, and recycling (90). As well, there is implicit acceptance of the role of technology in agriculture and industry, but appropriate technology is not discussed. The plan seeks simple and

effective solutions that will involve a minimal level of resources to develop institutional and technical capacity for environmental management (23).

The NPESD addresses contingency planning for natural disasters, such as floods and typhoons, which are a persistent threat along its long coastline, and also for oil spills (61-63), but it does not address risk management in terms of technological systems. A Development Perspective, as well as the ROW, also do not address risk management.

The ROW does not dwell on technology. It only states that women should have access and training in any technological advancement (19, 20).

Thus, it can be concluded that Viet Nam's development policy does not meet the requirements of the Brundtland objective for technology. It has accepted the importance of Western-style technology and has not challenged its role in sustainable development.

#### **4.8 Merging Environment and Economics in Decision-Making**

##### **4.8.1 The Brundtland Perspective**

All of the preceding discussion has been about aspects of merging environment and economics in policy and action. The Commission argues that environmental and economic concerns do not necessarily oppose each other, and it is optimistic that they can be integrated into institutional arrangements at all levels. Achieving this goal will, however, require

significant changes in attitudes, objectives, institutions and frameworks (62).

#### 4.8.2 Viet Nam's Perspective

A Development Perspective recognizes that "economic incentives and environment protection are two aspects of an integrated whole" and intends to use economic policy measures to "increase the responsibility of users in utilizing scarce environmental resources" (46). It does not discuss the limits of market mechanisms to provide for environmental protection, however. The NPESD also advocates pricing mechanisms and the "polluter pays" principle of environmental management in a market economy. The market regulates the cost of resources in this model (11).

The NPESD proposes a legal framework for environmental protection and conservation. Brundtland calls for changes in the legal framework that "start from the proposition that an environment adequate for health and well-being is essential for all human beings" (63).

One potentially serious problem is that the legislative framework will no doubt be worked out under pressures to make Viet Nam attractive to foreign investment and to encourage growth. Already there are contradictions and incompatibilities between the NPESD's vision and content. The weaker the language in this important document, the more

potential for compromise when faced with other development priorities.<sup>6</sup>

The ROW discusses the importance of including women in decision-making processes; that is the only aspect of decision-making that it addresses.

The Brundtland Commission does not elaborate on the mechanisms of merging ecology and economics in decision-making, but market regulation, such as Viet Nam proposes, is certainly one possibility. Given the Vietnamese government's failure to recognize the need for changing the quality of growth, however, I fear that too much reliance will be placed on the market, which has proven to be ineffective in providing for environmental protection. However, by the criteria of the Brundtland report, Viet Nam is addressing the issue of merging economics and environment in decision-making in its development and environment reports.

#### **4.9 Summary of Viet Nam's Perspective**

Vietnamese policy is fully congruent with three of the Brundtland objectives: meeting essential needs, ensuring a sustainable level of population, and merging environment and economics in decision-making. It exceeds the growth rate

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<sup>6</sup> For example, instead of "discouraging" practices such as the use of harmful agro-chemicals (SRV 1991, 13), "banning" them would be more decisive.

suggested in the first objective, but it is congruent with the spirit of the objective. It is not congruent with the objectives dealing with technology or changing the nature of growth. The level to which it is congruent with the objective dealing with conservation is unclear.

The Vietnamese policy on development and sustainable development meets some elements of the objectives put forward by the Brundtland Commission. Huynh and Stengel (1993), having carried out a superficial analysis of the NPESD, argue that its "tone and substance ... are in complete harmony with the Brundtland report" (275). My analysis does not share their enthusiasm. Nevertheless, the Vietnamese government has made a start toward sustainable development in the spirit of the Brundtland Commission.

#### **4.10 Contradictions and Conclusions**

##### **4.10.1 Contradictions**

The process of doing the preceding analysis raised in my mind three points of contradiction, in both Brundtland and the Vietnamese policy documents. My discomfort with the contradictions grew, and secondary research confirmed that these criticisms have been raised by other authors and could no longer be ignored. These points of contradiction roughly coincide with the strands of this thesis, economic development, sustainable development, and women. The following sections show that the Brundtland Commission's

argument for the need for growth is faulty; that the Vietnamese government's conception of sustainable development is also flawed; and finally, that both the Brundtland report and the Vietnamese government ignore the role of women in sustainable development.

#### A. The Role of Economic Growth in Development

One critical point hinted at in earlier discussion of the Brundtland report (in the sections addressing increasing growth and changing the nature of growth) is the role of growth in the sustainable development. The Brundtland Commission contradicts itself on this point. If the needs of today's people are met, meeting any future generations' needs will be impossible at current rates of growth, because of the consumption of resources required to sustain the growth.

The Brundtland Commission's solution of using economic growth for all countries ("developed" as well as "developing") to meet the minimum basic needs of their population and to achieve an "acceptable" level of average per capita wealth is unsustainable in the long term; in fact, it will not be possible to sustain such a growth rate much longer. At the five per cent rate that the Commission suggests, the global economic system must double every 17 years (Whitehead 1993), putting far too much strain on the global ecological system.

The ecological model of sustainable development discussed in Chapter Two provides support for this criticism of the

Brundtland model. Mies and Shiva (1993), in their discussion of the myth of "catch-up development," the belief that developing countries will eventually attain the standard of living enjoyed in the industrialized nations, also dispute the concept of continued growth as sustainable.<sup>7</sup>

A question related to the issue of growth is whether growth is necessary to eliminate poverty, as the Brundtland Commission claims (in its first objective). This argument has been frequently used to justify growth and industrialization, but it is an oversimplification of the issues (Jacob 1994, 244). In most cases where economic growth has occurred, poverty has remained the same, if not increased (UNDP 1996). The key to eliminating poverty is a redistribution of resources, not an increase. Unless underlying structures of ownership are changed, increasing growth does not guarantee any decrease in poverty. The resources already exist to eliminate poverty, or at least make a good start, if the political will existed. Thus, a central premise of the Brundtland report, the need for growth, is faulty.

These contradictions concerning the sustainability of growth and the need for growth at all raise serious concerns. These flaws cut across all the elements of the Brundtland

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<sup>7</sup> Jacob (1994) also comments on the implications of the ambiguity of the Brundtland report's language concerning the role of growth, and other concepts as well.

concept of sustainable development.<sup>8</sup> Although the Brundtland report has many valid suggestions on sustainable development, its analysis is fundamentally inadequate. It does not solve the underlying problems that are causing unsustainable development and environmental degradation.

Since Viet Nam exceeds the Brundtland Commission's guidelines for economic growth, it falls into the fallacious trap of believing that continued growth can be sustainable. Just as the Brundtland Commission's sustainable development is actually not sustainable, neither can Viet Nam's current development strategy be sustainable.

#### B. A Conceptual Basis for Sustainable Development

The Vietnamese government is attempting to create a development strategy that is both sustainable and able to lift the country out of poverty. This is not an easy task. The government faces many constraints, including the constraints imposed by the global market system; the need to balance a large number of pressing priorities; and a shortage of money. But its greatest obstacle to sustainable development is the government's poor understanding of the conceptual basis of sustainable development, which is translated into a poorly defined vision. It is trying to fit sustainable development

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<sup>8</sup> Pietila (1991, 197) adds another criticism of the Brundtland report: that it is too cautious and its "recommendations of what should be done, and how, are not consistent with the drastic [and accurate] diagnosis."

into a neo-liberal growth-oriented model of economic development which is fundamentally unsustainable.

A plan such as the NPESD that claims to present "the basis for developing the required inputs that will enable Vietnam to address its environmental challenges" (5) should have a solid conceptual base for understanding and analysis of sustainable development. Without knowing what sustainable development involves, the chances of success decrease. It is unfortunate that the NPESD does not articulate a vision of sustainable development; it is left with weaknesses and contradictions.

The NPESD does not address the contradictions between the needs of present and future generations, or acknowledge the difficulty of finding that delicate balance. Nor does it explain what it considers to be essential needs and how they will be met. Neither the preliminary discussion nor the document as a whole address these questions, which are fundamental to the vision of sustainable development being promoted by this plan.

### C. A Role for Women

Neither the Brundtland report nor the Vietnamese policy documents on development and sustainable development recognize the importance of women's role in sustainable development. In the over 300 page Brundtland report, women are only mentioned explicitly on a handful of pages. In a discussion on

agriculture, the report refers to women's "critical role" and "woefully inadequate" representation in support services (140); it recognizes the importance of giving women direct land rights, for their important role in growing food and "in the interests of food security" (141); and briefly it discusses women's needs in housing projects (257). Finally, women are discussed in the sections on population issues (38, 106). This brief recognition of women is not nearly enough. The Brundtland report "ignores the role of women in the management of environmental issues and in their potential to be agents of change in a new direction" (Pietila 1991, 197).<sup>9</sup>

As noted above, neither A Development Perspective nor the NPESD discuss women's role in either the economic transition or environmental management well. It is assumed that women's roles and women's needs are similar to men's, that they can be integrated into the general vision of the documents. The ROW is also inadequate in its analysis of women's roles, particularly their potential as agents of change. Is the women's perspective that is presented in the ROW significantly different than the general (male) one presented in A Development Perspective and the NPESD? The ROW simply attempts to explicitly integrate women into the existing development structure, or plan; it does not suggest any substantial change. It falls into Women In Development (WID)

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<sup>9</sup> See Wacker (1993) for further criticism on this point.

thinking, which, as stated in Chapter Two, is the most conservative, least transformative, framework for women and development.

#### 4.10.2 Conclusions

Despite its flaws, the Brundtland Commission's report remains a valuable document. Its widespread acceptance "placed the linkage between environment and development at the top of the global agenda, and ... stimulated an important body of work on sustainability" (Jacob 1994, 248).

Using the Brundtland criteria to analyze Viet Nam has been a useful exercise. Not only was it a useful analytical tool for the Vietnamese policy documents, but it was an appropriate one. Since Viet Nam's development strategy did not "pass" as sustainable by these criteria, it would certainly not have "passed" by stricter criteria. The Brundtland criteria were able to highlight Viet Nam's strengths, something which the ecological perspective, with its emphasis on zero growth, for example, would not have done.

It is instructive as well to note that Viet Nam "scored" quite well on the since-discredited economic growth objective. This points to a larger flaw than simply the Brundtland's analysis. Similarly, the NPESD and A Development Perspective do not include women in their vision of sustainable development, just as the Brundtland report ignores them. This also alerts us to larger issues.

The fundamental flaws in the Brundtland report, namely the lack of analysis of women's roles, and the argument for the need for growth, call for a theoretical re-examination, as does the similarity between the Brundtland Commission's position and that of Viet Nam. In Chapter Five, I examine feminist perspectives on the themes of economic development, sustainable development, and women, and use their intersections to create an integrated framework that is transformative, and solves the problems left by the Vietnamese analysis.

Having developed that framework, in Chapter Six I will re-analyze Viet Nam from this perspective. The fact that Viet Nam did only moderately well by the Brundtland Commission's standards indicates that using stricter guidelines to re-evaluate the nature of Viet Nam's development would not be useful. Instead, a more constructive approach would be to use the feminist sustainable development framework to make constructive suggestions for change.

Before returning to more theoretical musings, I would like to make one final point in defence of the Brundtland Commission. The Brundtland report, like the visionary documents that have come out of the recent series of UN conferences on development, environment, and social issues, is important for creating a vision of sustainable development. Even if it is contradictory and insufficient, it contains many important suggestions; if only a few of them were truly put

into action, the world would be a better place<sup>10</sup>. For example, using renewable resources in a renewable, sustainable manner would result in a vast improvement in the health of the global environment.

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<sup>10</sup> In a presentation on the Beijing Conference, Katherine McDonald, addressing the criticism that the Platform for Action did not go far enough in suggesting change, commented that if even a few of the paragraphs were truly put into action, the world would be a much better place (26 October 1995).

**CHAPTER FIVE**  
**FEMINIST SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**5.1 Feminist Positions on Sustainable Development**

The analysis of Viet Nam's policy documents using the Brundtland Commission's criteria for sustainable development in Chapter Four established the need for a new theoretical framework for examining the concept of "development" in such a way that it is ecologically sustainable and inclusive of women. I now look to feminist writings to develop such a framework. I begin by examining three different perspectives of feminist thought on development, environment, and women. Each addresses all three themes, but draws on different approaches, and thus brings attention to different elements and perspectives. *Women, Environment, and Development* has a conceptual basis in development, ecofeminism in ecology, and

global feminisms in feminism.<sup>1</sup> Although the three theoretical strands are rooted in different literatures, they all lead in the same direction, towards a feminist sustainable development framework. The second section of this chapter elaborates on this framework. It first clarifies the concept of feminist sustainable development and then draws out certain features particularly relevant to a discussion of sustainable development in Viet Nam that will be presented in Chapter Six.

#### 5.1.1 Women, Environment, and Development

This literature, conceptually rooted in development, represents a convergence of thought around the issues of women, environment and development. Dankelman and Davidson's 1988 book, Women and Environment in the Third World was an important early contribution in establishing connections between women, environment and development. It was written before the acronym WED became common. Today, there are at least two definitions of WED. According to Harcourt (1994) it means "Women and Environment and Alternatives to Development"; according to Braidotti et al. (1994) it means simply "Women, Environment and Development."

Women and Environment and Alternatives to Development, which came out of the Society for International Development

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<sup>1</sup> I am not arguing that these are in any way definitive conceptual roots; I am merely using them as examples, to organize the literature to fit into a structure parallel to the rest of this thesis.

(SID), is a critical reaction to WID's failure to adequately understand gender relations within the economic framework (Harcourt 1994). It reflects the shift during the late 1980s and early 1990s in thinking on gender and development (Harcourt 1994, 20). It transcends criticizing economic development theory and "mounts a profound critique on the whole development process" (Harcourt 1994, 3). It draws on non-rational, non-Western knowledge systems for understanding the complex relationships between gender, the environment, and the market.

WED discourse "opens up a space for questioning the developmental enterprise itself" and "signals a more critical attitude towards modernity and the modernizing process, ... opening up possibilities for voices of non-modern, non-commodified and usually non-Western women to be heard in a new way; for their knowledge and ways of life to be taken seriously as potential alternatives to modernity and the commodification that comes with it" (Apffel-Marglin and Simon 1994, 26).

Apffel-Marglin and Simon (1994) describe an alternative way of life in which nature and women's bodies are not treated as resources but are integrated into socio-cultural processes, where there is no distinction between productive and reproductive labour. They consider this a more ecologically sound way of life, and a more sustainable relationship between

nature and culture, than liberal feminism and WID theory envision.

WED thinking has shifted from viewing women as victims of their situations (more common in WID thinking) to viewing them as a key source of solutions and change (Braidotti et al. 1994, 2), an important step in empowering women. Women working in a WED framework (as well as global feminists and others) have "created a space for a large variety of women, eventually even women from the grassroots who are most affected, to voice their concerns in international fora which discussed solutions to the global environmental crisis" (Braidotti et al. 1994, 2).

### 5.1.2 Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism combines feminist and ecological consciousness. It grew out of the feminist, peace and ecology movements of the late 1970s and early 1980s (Mies and Shiva 1993, 13). The awareness of the connection between patriarchal violence against both women and nature emerged from the protest and action against environmental destruction. The perspective of ecofeminism "starts from the fundamental necessities of life" (Mies and Shiva 1993, 20). It tries to be a "genuinely antihierarchical, enlightened, and broadly oppositional movement .. [to] oppose sexism and the many forces that are at work in destroying the biosphere and trammelling human freedom" (Biehl 1991, 1).

Although development is not the primary focus of ecofeminism, it criticizes global capitalism, growth, technological progress and patriarchal structures, and the violent oppression they produce. Ecofeminism envisions a holistic vision of a non-patriarchal reality, but it has not fully articulated this vision (Biehl 1991). It calls for more creative thought in making connections and finding solutions.<sup>2</sup>

An ecofeminist perspective propounds the need for a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love. The primary insight of ecofeminism is that all issues of oppression are interconnected, that to understand how to heal and liberate our world, we must look at the relationships between the various systems by which power is constructed. In an ecofeminist vision, there is no such thing as a struggle for women's rights separate from a struggle to repair the living systems of the earth that sustain life, or a struggle for gender equality that can be divided from a struggle for equality along lines of race, culture, economics, ancestry, religion, sexual orientation or physical ability. (Starhawk cited in Diamond 1994, ix)

Although ideally development, environment, and women are interconnected, this is not always the case, as Diamond points out:

Just as ecological consciousness is not intrinsic to feminism, feminist consciousness is not intrinsic to ecological thinking. It is not just any effort to save the Earth that will enhance the well being of women. (1994, 134)

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on aspects of ecofeminism which I do not address here, such as spirituality and language, see Diamond (1994), Diamond and Orenstein (1990), Merchant (1980), Plant (1989), and Griffin (1978). Biehl (1991) makes a critical analysis of ecofeminism.

Braidotti et al. also address the difficulty in finding common ground that sometimes exists between feminists and environmentalists, but claim that "the difference between these groups is often only a matter of priorities" (1994, 29). Ultimately, patriarchal structures are the root of both women's oppression and environmental destruction.

### 5.1.3 Global Feminisms

Global feminisms understand the "global economic, political and military relationships [that] connect us all through a series of ties that do not bind but rather alienate us from one another" (Miles 1996, 131). First World and Third World feminists together are weaving connections and collaborations, "hold[ing] the seeds of the world they want to create" (Miles 1996, 133). Many of the most holistic visions of feminist sustainable development spring from global feminisms.

DAWN's 1987 work, Development, Crises, and Alternative Visions: Third World Women's Perspectives, contains an important analysis of the links between women, environment and development, arguing that the "development crisis and its impact on poor women had a great deal to do with problems in the dominant development paradigm (DAWN 1995, 1). DAWN's 1995 statement for the Beijing conference focuses on new trends and priorities in development, primarily globalization and governments' accountability, human development, sustainable

livelihoods, and alternatives to the dominant development models. DAWN continues to emphasize sustainable development that focuses on the needs of poor women, and the importance of guiding principles that come from Southern women's perspectives and experiences (1995, 4).

Another Southern feminist, Vandana Shiva, is a well-known activist and scholar in the field of feminist sustainable development.<sup>3</sup> She combines her experiences with grassroots women's movements in India and her training in the natural sciences to develop a profound criticism of the Western model of development. Shiva co-authored Ecofeminism (1993) with Maria Mies, a German feminist who has also made important feminist contributions in her analysis of patriarchy in a global context (Mies 1986, Bennholdt-Thomsen, and von Werlhof 1988).

## **5.2 Feminist Sustainable Development**

### **5.2.1 Introduction and Definition**

I will now combine these three theoretical strands and clarify the feminist sustainable development framework that they suggest. Feminist sustainable development is radical<sup>4</sup> and transformative. It is based in the reality of poor rural women's lives; it seeks inspiration from alternative

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<sup>3</sup> Shiva is also considered to be an ecofeminist.

<sup>4</sup> Radical, from the Latin radix, meaning root (Carmen 1994, 63).

knowledge; it draws western and non-western traditions but it rejects the violence of patriarchal structures. It is egalitarian, non-hierarchical and non-dualistic. It affirms life and is active:

A feminist response that is ecological must necessarily reactivate a conscious awareness of, and dialogue with, nature, lifting it out of its patriarchal definition as something passive and inert -- a definition that has also been extended to women (Shiva 1994, 4)

Feminist sustainable development includes planning for the seventh generation, encompassing the concept of "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 43). But it is more. Its transformative vision is of a just world that is at peace with itself and its inhabitants:

There is only one path to survival and liberation for nature, women and men, and that is the ecological path to harmony, sustainability, and diversity. (Shiva cited in Kelly 1994, 130)

Without considering the needs and contributions of women, without encompassing women and being encompassed by women, no form of development can be sustainable. Feminist sustainable development is concerned with all issues of social justice, for they are fundamentally interconnected. Feminist development requires a redistribution of resources and power not only to create material equity, but to give women equal status in society and access to decision-making processes. It demands ecologically sustainable development, and socially

responsible use and management of resources. It sees peace as essential to development.

The roots of poverty, violence, environmental destruction, and oppression lie in a patriarchal system that gives men superiority and control over women and nature. The power structures of inequality reinforce the oppression. Any form of superiority over others results in oppressive control, whether it is in terms of race, clan, nation, religion or culture, or sex.

The same phenomena which are causing environmental destruction are impoverishing women as well. These underlying problems include:

- the unsustainably high rate of natural resource consumption

- the narrowing of traded products from agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and the commercialization of many subsistence resources

- the failure of economic systems to value the environment and its resources or the value of women's unpaid labour and the failure to account for intangibles such as social stability, inter- and intra-generational equity and self-sufficiency

- the inequity in the ownership, management and flow of benefits from both the use and the conservation of natural resources

- the deficiencies in knowledge and its applications

- the promotion of unsustainable exploitation by legal and institutional systems (Abramowitz 1994, 202-203)

Feminist sustainable development draws on a multitude of perspectives and voices. These feminists are not searching for a new unified model or theory of development, but want

"flexibility and an openness to working with diverse knowledge and systems" (Harcourt 1994, 6). There are no right or wrong feminist perspectives on sustainable development, and the debate thrives on creative tension (Harcourt 1994).

The work that women do means that their relationship to nature is different from men's; women are affected differently and more strongly by environmental degradation.<sup>5</sup> Women's everyday lives hold a strong relationship to their natural environments, partly due to the nature of their labour. Women in all societies do the bulk of the household work; in many they play significant roles in agricultural work. Over 90 per cent of women in the developing world depend on the land for survival (Chitepo in Dankelman and Davidson 1988, ix). Rural women in the South carry out the bulk of the labour in subsistence tasks including gathering and using water and firewood; planting, irrigating and harvesting crops, for subsistence and sometimes for income as well; these responsibilities make the rural woman of the developing world the most vulnerable to environmental degradation.

A woman is the first to experience the effects of a polluted water source; she will be the one to walk the extra time to the next-closest clean source of water. As primary agricultural labourers, women deal with the issues of desertification, salination, soil erosion, and bear the

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<sup>5</sup> Antrobus (1992), Rocheleau (1987), Bruce and Fortmann (1988), Shiva (1988), Mies and Shiva (1993), Diamond and Orenstein (1990) and Dankelman and Davidson (1988).

greater stress of a move to more arable land. As gatherers of wood and other forest products, they bear the brunt of deforestation. As the primary care-takers of the health of their families, they are the first to notice the health effects of a poisoned environment. Diamond asserts that "It is not accidental that we find this grounded, Earth-based hope for freedom and change in a cultural and economic wisdom derives from the practices of daily living in rural communities" (1994, 141). Women living in urban areas are also aware of environmental degradation, as they are responsible for the provision and preparation of food and water, and sometimes fuel, as well as health care for their families (Diamond 1994, 132).

Some ecofeminists argue that there is an inherent connection between women and nature (Biehl 1991), but this premise is essentialist, keeping women in their patriarchal roles. The assertion that women are inherently more nurturing is controversial. The earth as nurturing mother (and development as rape of Mother Earth) is a common image/metaphor in ecofeminist and other ecological writing (Merchant 1980; Diamond 1994), however, and does not always imply essentialism. Shiva argues for a "feminine principle" of activity and creativity in nature which is not limited to being embodied in women. Indeed, she sees this as a "trans-gender" or "non-gender" option to common feminist solutions to liberation (Shiva 1988, 52).

Feminist sustainable development does not exclusively focus on women. Development that improves the lives of women will also improve the lives of poor and disempowered men, of whom there are also many, especially in the South. "[N]either women nor any other concerned group can assume a monopoly on providing valid solutions to the crisis" (Braidotti et al. 1994, 8). A very small group of elite, white, Northern men control the majority of the power and wealth in the world. In most countries, men do have more power than women, but that does not mean that men are not also oppressed; the structures of patriarchal oppression are complex and have ensnared most men. Men's frustration is often expressed in violence, against women and other men. It is not condoned as a result of oppression, but it must be addressed. Feminist sustainable development is not exclusive to women, for a truly equitable world will benefit men as much as women.

Discussing a feminist vision of sustainability "implies a questioning of what kind of lives we wish to lead and what kind of development we want" (Häusler 1994, 153). It is in the answers to these questions that the diversity of feminist sustainable development is realized; much less disagreement exists in the answers to "what kind of development do we not want?" DAWN has developed a very eloquent vision of what we want:

We want a world where inequality based on class, gender, and race is absent from every country, and from the relationships among countries. We want a world where basic needs become basic rights and

where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity, and women's values of nurturance and solidarity will characterize human relationships. In such a world women's reproductive role will be redefined: child care will be shared by men, women, and society as a whole. We want a world where the massive resources now used in the production of the means of destruction will be diverted to areas where they will help to relieve oppression both inside and outside the home. This technological revolution will eliminate disease and hunger, and give women means for the safe control of their fertility. We want a world where all institutions are open to participatory democratic processes, where women share in determining priorities and making decisions. (Sen and Grown 1987, 80-81)

The following section discusses features of feminist sustainable development, transformation of values and economic alternatives, and builds a better understanding of the vision.

### 5.2.2 Transformation of Values Featuring Equality

#### A. The Need for Equality

The most transformative part of feminist sustainable development theory deals with creating a non-patriarchal, non-capitalistic holistic environment where sustainable development is possible. The key to creating this is equality: a broad, non-hierarchical concept of equality that encompasses humans and their natural surroundings. Equality is the most fruitful way to begin thinking about the transformation of values that feminist sustainable development requires.

This non-hierarchical equality is not the same as the mainstream concept of equality. The feminist movement has a long history of struggling for equality between women and men; it forms the basis for most or all of the various kinds of feminism. Equality is becoming increasingly popular in many parts of the world. But much of the rhetoric and action surrounding equality has involved mainstreaming women into a system that is still hierarchical and exploitative, which is a misleading interpretation of equality.

Equality in a feminist sustainable development sense is much broader than the mainstream conception. It means a total transformation of social structures to remove hierarchy. Such a transformation would mean fundamental change in all aspects of life, including social, political, and economic structures, and interpersonal relationships. The principle of equality leads to non-exploitation of people and of nature, which is also key to feminist sustainable development. Equality means more than just equality between the sexes: the concept encompasses equality between races, cultures, and nations; as well as equal distribution of wealth, resources, power, and opportunity; and a relationship with nature that is non-exploitative. Embracing non-hierarchical equality would result in peace, respect, cooperation, and community being valued highly. All of the elements of feminist sustainable development examined below are based on this principle of non-hierarchical equality.

## B. Frameworks for Knowing

The way we understand our world is fundamental. For this reason, feminists have developed a strong critique of Western reductionist science. Feminists do not consider science to be universal, value-free and neutral, as its proponents advocate; instead it is "highly contextualized" and situated in a socio-cultural context that is "white, male, supremacist, [and] hegemonic" (Braidotti et al. 1994, 30). It upholds patriarchal structures, excludes women, and objectifies nature.

Western capitalism requires this reductionism to support its economic and political organization (Shiva 1988). Shiva rejects the universality of the Western scientific paradigm that informs most development projects, the (mis)conception that subsistence living is equivalent to poverty, the confusion that growth equals development, and the supremacy of Western knowledge systems that denies knowledge that is not based in Western rationality.

The hegemonic nature of science causes the knowledge of indigenous peoples and women to be dismissed and ignored. Yet this knowledge has an essential understanding of nature and humanity's relationship to it. Women in developing countries "are often able to offer ecological insights that are richer and deeper than the technocratic recipes of international experts or the responses of men in their own societies" (Shiva 1994, 1). Documentation of this knowledge and its social,

economic and ecological value is critical (Abramowitz 1994, 209).

Feminism rejects dualistic thinking. Dualism is hierarchical and creates relationships based on power that result in control, oppression, and fragmentation. Examples of dualistic hierarchies that Western thinking has created are man over woman; mind over body; culture over nature; subject over object. Developed over developing is an extension of this mode of thinking. These dualities are so "deeply inscribed in patterns of thinking ... [that they] appear normal,' 'natural' and altogether neutral" (Braidotti et al. 1994, 30).

Feminist sustainable development also has a strong cultural component; it is not proposing universal visions or universal solutions. Since it opposes the cultural imperialism of modernization, it is sensitive to cultural appropriateness. Change must come from within a society, not be imposed by outside powers.

A non-hierarchical educational system is vital in the creation and maintenance of a feminist sustainable development perspective in a society, since education plays an important part in the formation of individual and social attitudes and transferring of culture. Equality in the education of men and women should take place within a curriculum that develops values of respect and equality.

### C. Peace and Violence

Equality is intrinsic to peace. The ultimate cause of violence is hierarchical relationships; without hierarchy there would be no reason for violence.

The relationship between violence and development is addressed by authors such as Sen and Grown (1987), Vickers (1993) and Mies and Shiva (1993).<sup>6</sup> Violence in its many forms has a profound effect on both development and the environment. From the destruction of human and non-human life and resources that armed conflict produces, to the enormous resources diverted to military spending that could provide basic needs to millions of people, the global problems of arms and war are directly related to sustainable development. Sen and Grown (1987) argue that development without peace is not possible, let alone sustainable.

Militarism and excessive military spending are counterproductive for ecologically and socially sustainable development. Military spending exacerbates confrontational attitudes, breeds a spiralling cycle of spending that at its worst resulted in the nuclear detente of the Cold War, and defensive attitudes that are not receptive to negotiation. Military industry is resource-intensive, removes resources from more constructive, sustainable uses, and increases pollution (Vickers 1993; Waring 1988). For example, the

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<sup>6</sup> This relationship is often overlooked in development theory, but has been recognized by Schrijvers (1993), for example.

worldwide military expenditure of 110 dollars for every women, man, and child is more than is spent on food, water, health, education, shelter, and ecosystem protection (Waring 1988, 166).

Structural violence is more than physical force. It is oppression and denial that is built into a system. It includes "the denial of a human being's right to food, health and economic security" (Vickers 1993, 89) as well as racism, apartheid, sexism, foreign domination, poverty and other types of discrimination (Vickers 1993, 106). The economic exploitation of one group by another, whether between nations or groups within a nation, is violence; our "culture of materialism" depends on "violence, oppression and domination ... to keep the powerless" (Kelly 1994, 60).

Vickers (1991, 27) describes the relationship between domestic violence and poverty: increasing financial instability and economic hardship lead to increased levels of frustration in the family, which leads to an increase in domestic violence. Feminist sustainable development renounces the social and economic structures that lead to violence at any level, against women, men, and nature.

#### D. Political Framework

The political framework for feminist sustainable development must be open, democratic, participatory, and non-hierarchical. A just political system is closely related to a just economic

system: power and wealth must be distributed equitably. Grassroots participation in government is critical. Democracy in the context of feminist sustainable development is not democracy as currently practised in the West, but an accessible, accountable and transparent method of governance. Strengthening "countervailing institutions to executive power, such as genuinely democratic and non-corrupt legislative bodies, an impartial judiciary, open communications media, [and] freedom of information and association" (DAWN 1995, 39) is also important.

Petra Kelly's description of Green Politics is very similar to the vision of feminist sustainable development:

Our effort is to redefine and reorganize power so that it flows from the bottom up. We seek to decentralize power and maximize the freedom and self-determination of individuals, communities, and societies. ... It also means reaching across national borders and ideologies to build alliances with others also working for peace and ecology. (1994, 42)

Although feminist sustainable development encourages participatory, grassroots-based governance, it does not absolve the state of its responsibilities towards its citizens. The right-wing agenda has adopted the language of community-oriented democracy to avoid its responsibility and promote the corporate agenda. The state remains the only check on transnational capital, in the hands of multinational corporations. Thus, a primary goal of a feminist sustainable development framework is to re-invent the state, to reassert its authority, and to reconstruct it so that it "become[s]

more accountable to the needs and concerns of ordinary citizens, instead of only the rich and powerful, inside or outside the country" (DAWN 1995, 39).

### 5.2.3 Economic Alternatives Featuring Non-Exploitation

Feminist sustainable development envisions a system of economics that is not fundamentally exploitative and destructive of people and nature. Non-exploitation is of course intimately related to equality: in an environment of true equality, it is not possible for exploitation to exist. Feminist sustainable development criticizes many aspects of capitalist, market, growth-oriented development: its exploitation of nature and women; its confused assumption that growth is development; the unequal relationship between "developed" and "developing," which is based on a false dichotomy. To achieve a just economic system, several conditions are required: women's work and nature must be valued; solutions must be found for poverty; resources and wealth, both within and among nations, must be more justly redistributed.

The next five sections deal with various elements of a non-exploitative economic system. The first outlines the feminist sustainable development argument against capitalism. Next, the value of women's and nature's work; resource conservation and management; poverty; and population issues are examined.

## A. Criticisms of Capitalist Development

Feminists criticize the "development as growth" model for many reasons. The inequality between North and South must be resolved in order for development to be sustainable on a global basis; the West must accept responsibility for global economic problems, and Western overconsumption is one component of this inequality. Feminist theorists are critical of the West -- both for its responsibility in creating and benefitting from structures of global inequity, and for the detrimental effects of the Western consumer lifestyle.

Shiva considers "maldevelopment" a more appropriate term for the industrialisation that has occurred since the end of colonialism. She defines maldevelopment as

a violation of the integrity of organic, interconnected and interdependent systems, that sets in motion a process of exploitation, inequality, injustice and violence. (Shiva 1988, 5)

Mies and Shiva see development and modernization as inherently destructive (1993, 144). Shiva writes:

'Development' has meant the ecological and cultural rupture of bonds with nature, and within society, it has meant the transformation of organic communities into groups of uprooted and alienated individuals searching for abstract identities. (Mies and Shiva 1993, 99<sup>7</sup>)

Esteva considers development to be "a permanent war waged by its promoters and suffered by its victims" (cited in Shiva 1988, 13).

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<sup>7</sup> In Mies and Shiva's Ecofeminism (1993), the authors take turns writing individual chapters, so it is appropriate to indicate the individual author in the citations.

Mies and Shiva criticise the process of growth not only for its irresponsible consumption of resources and exploitation of the less powerful, but also for its final products, waste and pollution, much of it toxic, that leads to problems of disposal of waste and toxic waste, pollution and poisoning of resources, destruction of the ozone layer, and the greenhouse effect.

Sustainable development theory (as discussed in Chapter Two) argues for limits to growth, given the earth's inability to sustain unlimited growth, and it charges that progress is achieved at the cost of the environment. Mies puts the matter much more strongly:

What modern machine-man does to the earth will eventually be felt by all; everything is connected. 'Unlimited Progress' is a dangerous myth because it suggests that we can rape and destroy living nature, of which we are an integral part, without suffering the effects. (Mies and Shiva 1993, 93)

Another dangerous aspect to the myth of Unlimited Progress is that it is not possible for all to achieve it. Explaining that "a growth-oriented industrial world market system is non-sustainable and non generalizable worldwide," Mies points out that we would need at least two planets for such a system, one to provide resources, and one to dump the garbage (Mies and Shiva 1993, 252). Early development theory assumed that the Western standard of success was generalizable to all; even today many people believe that everyone can live as we do in the west. Because this goal is impossible -- even for one generation, let alone for future generations -- an inherent

inequality between the North and South exists that cannot be ameliorated by simply catching up.

Many feminist development theorists do not want developing countries to become what industrial societies are; not only because it is unsustainable and impossible anyway, but because they do not see it as a goal worth striving towards. Moss (1994) writes of the spiritual and social poverty of the North that is caused by our economic system and our consumption habits. Because we spend long hours to earn the money to buy the things we believe we need, we do not have the time or energy for social integration. Thus "[o]ur communities are torn apart by the way production and reproduction are organized" (Moss 1994, 245). Polanyi, although not an ecofeminist, also recognized that "market forces destroy communities" (cited in Mies and Shiva 1993, 61).

Biehl (1991) criticizes capitalism for the destruction of community and the damage caused by the separation of the workplace from the home and the "fragmentation of the domestic sphere into isolated family units" (Biehl 1991, 53). The resulting isolation of women and many men from the public sphere and from each other "eroded the community life ... in which women had been highly visible and no less central than men" (Biehl 1991, 53). Biehl describes capitalism as a form of domination that has eroded "community and a meaningful existence" (Biehl 1991, 53). This destruction of community

hurts many men as well as women and since women and men are both hurt by racism and the destruction of the biosphere, both results of capitalism, the "liberation of women depends on the destruction of these institutions as a whole, not only the destruction of male domination" (Biehl 1991, 54).

Shiva and Mies recognize the irony of Western society, which "in the midst of plenty lacks the fundamental necessities of life -- clean air, pure water, healthy food, space, time and quiet" (1993, 61). They do not want developing countries to experience these side-effects of industrialization.

#### B. Revaluing Women's and Nature's Work

One of the reasons that development has failed, and failed women and the environment in particular, is that economic accounting systems do not recognise environmental costs of production or women's domestic and reproductive labour:

The externalization of women's work and nature's work from dominant economic thought has allowed women's and nature's contributions to be used but not recognised. (Shiva 1994, 4)

Changing the way natural processes and women's work is valued, both socially and officially, is necessary to make development sustainable.

By examining what kinds of work are valued, and expanding the definition of productive work to include housework, child bearing and rearing, informal sector work, and volunteer work,

the activities of women would become part of, instead of separate from, development. National accounting systems do not include environmental degradation or natural processes, all unpaid work of women, and all leisure activities. Waring (1988) criticizes the United Nations System of National Accounting for these omissions. Changing the system would give a more accurate representation of economic activity and its social and environmental repercussions, and would thus make development planning more meaningful. This would have profound implications for sustainable development.

A global movement towards environmental accounting or "ecological economics" grew out of the Earth Summit, and the World Bank and USAID have taken up the idea. Putting a monetary value on nature is difficult, since no economic instrument exists which could "adequately attribute market value to any part of the ecosystem or to any part of the ecosystem function" (Waring 1994, 159). Nevertheless, World Bank economist Herman Daly tried to do this by adjusting the U.S. GNP to account for depletions in natural capital, pollution damage, and income distribution, and found that no growth has occurred in the U.S. in the last 25 years; only a depletion of natural capital (Waring 1994, 156).<sup>8</sup>

Although ecological economics seems like an important element in making economic development processes more

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<sup>8</sup> For further explanation of including environmental "externalities" into national accounting systems, see also Warford (1989).

ecologically sound, Waring ultimately rejects it for its patriarchal and exclusive character. She sees it as "urg[ing] us even further towards values of pathological destructiveness" (1994, 161). She urges an alternative to quantification as a way of valuing the natural environment. Such an alternative would require a fundamental rethinking of the economic system at all levels, one that would be based on changing deeply-seated societal beliefs about value.

### C. Resource Conservation and Management

The way we think of nature -- whether we see it as something to be exploited, used for our purposes, to feed our factories and be waste receptacles, or whether we understand our dependence on nature, our responsibility to nature both in terms of sustainability, for future generations of human beings, but also because we recognize an inherent value in nature that goes beyond our needs -- determines how we manage it.

In a system where non-renewable resources are not exploited, and renewable resources are used in a sustainable manner -- where they are not polluted and not overharvested -- resource conservation and management becomes much easier than it is in our current system. Conservation and management would be built into the system.

It is important that women's knowledge in these areas be respected and used. Women's closer relationship with nature

in their daily lives and household work gives them substantial insight into resource management and conservation practices. Because women are often the first to experience environmental degradation it is important that they have an integral role in management, both because of their insight and because they will have to deal with the solutions, and will suffer if they are inappropriate. Women should generally participate equally in decision-making of course; but here they have a particularly significant role to play.

#### D. Poverty

Shiva differentiates between two kinds of poverty. Subsistence living is not necessarily poverty. The "material experience" of poverty is dispossession and deprivation, but not all subsistence living is material poverty (Shiva 1988, 10). It is one of the vanities of Western thinking that we equate the two, and consider people living in subsistence lifestyles as in need of development and a better life.

Feminist sustainable development follows the alternative development paradigm's conceptualization of basic needs as more than merely physical subsistence needs. As discussed in Chapter Two, non-material needs such as self-reliance, freedom, community and culture, peace, and justice, are equally important (Henderson 1993, 83; Braidotti et al. 1994, 108).

Poverty has structural causes that have been discussed above. Solutions for poverty must be reconceptualized; obviously current attempts at solving poverty that are predicated on growth are not working (see the discussion in Chapter Four). The structural causes must be solved (Waring 1988, Mies and Shiva 1993).

#### E. Population Issues

Feminist sustainable development challenges the common beliefs about overpopulation. Much of mainstream development believes that population growth is one of the main causes of the environmental crisis, and advocates population control as an important element of sustainable development.<sup>9</sup>

Feminists, while acknowledging the relationship between population and environmental degradation, suggest that it is more complex than this theory suggests, and consider it a symptom of a

global economic system that contributed to environmental degradation by forcing poor people to cultivate marginal soils, destroy their own resource base and resort to unsustainable modes of subsistence. (Braidotti et al. 1994, 143)

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<sup>9</sup> This argument is traced back to Malthus, who studied explosion of population in the 19th century and argued that the food supply does not keep up with a rapidly expanding population. He postulated a vicious cycle of population growth, underemployment and infant mortality, and advocated fertility control to break this cycle. Neo-Malthusians and others in this century have expanded on Malthus's arguments (Braidotti et al. 1994, 142-43).

Factors that contribute significantly to environmental degradation include the exploitative global economic system, which creates poverty in the South and wasteful and polluting production and consumption processes in the North; unequal distribution of wealth on both global and regional levels, and modern urbanization patterns (Braidotti et al. 1994; Mies and Shiva 1993).<sup>10</sup> Following a simple population reduction solution ignores these other causes, and often justify fertility control measures which are "an assault on individuals' rights and well-being" (Braidotti et al. 1994, 144). Fertility control, whether advocated by Malthus or by modern environmentalists, is a patriarchal solution and unacceptable in a feminist sustainable development framework. The Cairo Declaration on population and development reflects a recent shift in thinking of population issues towards a more feminist perspective (Keyfitz 1995).

According to feminist sustainable development theory, reducing population growth rates is still an important goal, but it must be voluntary. People-centred, basic needs-oriented development; land reform; changing consumption patterns; and decreasing excessive military spending are more important goals. Finally, the enforcement of women's rights to self-determination and control over their bodies, the provision of comprehensive reproductive health care, and

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<sup>10</sup> Braidotti et al. (1994) cite feminist research that shows that these factors are more significant in environmental degradation than is population in the South.

education of women is a crucial element in sustainable population policies (Braidotti et al. 1994).

### **5.3 Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has explained how women, environment, and development are fundamentally interconnected. Reductionist scientific thought separates the concepts, sometimes even opposes them so that we do not combine our energies to fight the anti-women, anti-nature basis of the patriarchal social and economic structures that are found throughout the world.

Feminist sustainable development's vision is transformative. Among the elements of its vision that I have discussed is a need for the transformation of values. Instead of maintaining patriarchal structures that are oppressive and exploitative, commodifying nature, promoting growth that is ecologically destructive, maintaining unequal relationships between the West and the economic South, a feminist sustainable development framework envisions transforming these structures into social and economic systems that do not exploit women, men or the natural environment and that work within the ecological limits of the Earth. To create such a system, equality and justice must be made a priority. Nature must be valued in a way that reflects human beings' dependence on the natural world for survival. A harmonious, not an exploitative relationship between women and men, between the

nations of the world, and between humans and nature, is necessary.

Aeldred of Rievaulx in the twelfth century wrote the following words about the three kinds of love;<sup>11</sup> the words apply equally well to these strands of development, environment, and women:

though obviously different, yet so amazingly dovetail into one another that not only is each found in all of them and all in each, but where you have one there you have all, and should one fail, all fail. (cited in Saul 1995, 80)

Chapter Six will continue the themes of this chapter. It will apply the feminist sustainable development framework established here to Viet Nam. It will use the three categories, transformation of values, alternative economics, and ecological issues, to consider what this theory can offer to Viet Nam.

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<sup>11</sup> The three kinds of love are love of self, love of others, and love of God.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **6.1 Summary of Thesis**

The goal of this thesis has been to develop an alternate model that can guide Viet Nam through its economic transition process. The analysis has been centred around three facets of development that are equally important: economic development, environmental issues, and women's participation. This chapter begins with a summary of the first five chapters of the thesis before concluding with an analysis of a feminist sustainable development framework in the Vietnamese context.

I began this thesis by examining the so-called success story of the NICs, to determine whether they provide a good model for Viet Nam to follow in its path of economic renovation. A study of the social and ecological consequences of the rapid industrialization of those countries led me to conclude that they did not set a good example. The feminist

nature of this thesis produced research that is aware of women's oppression, grounded in women's experiences, and oriented toward change. I have used my experiences in Viet Nam to guide my interpretation of the theory and data.

In the theoretical discussion in Chapter Two, I examined the three themes of the thesis, economic development, sustainable development, and women and development. The economic development paradigm dominates mainstream development theory and practice. Alternative development theory has been generated out of the mainstream's lack of consideration of ecological and women's issues. I examined sustainable development theory, looking at two models, the one put forth by the Brundtland Commission, and the other an ecological model that is ecologically "pure" but sometimes considered politically impractical. Finally, I examined theoretical frameworks that address the issue of women's place in development. From Boserup's ground-breaking work, through WID, WAD, and GAD, I concluded with the transformative vision of DAWN that foreshadowed the feminist sustainable development framework of Chapter Five. This theoretical discussion which explained the three themes, also examined their interconnections and provided a theoretical basis for the rest of this thesis.

Chapter Three grounded the thesis in the context of Viet Nam. After a short overview of Vietnamese history and culture, I examined Viet Nam in more detail, focusing on each

of the three themes: economic development, environment, and women. This chapter provided a basis for some of the analysis later in this chapter.

Chapter Four's analysis of three Vietnamese policy documents with the Brundtland Commission's objectives for sustainable development resulted in a better understanding of Viet Nam's development plan. Viet Nam's concept of sustainable development is only partially congruent with that of the Brundtland Commission. This analysis revealed some fundamental problems. The Brundtland Commission's conception of the role of economic growth in sustainable development is contradictory. Viet Nam's strong commitment to economic growth poses a problem. The Vietnamese government's vision of sustainable development is not well articulated in its policy documents, which is another serious concern. Finally, neither the Brundtland report nor the Vietnamese government have a satisfactory understanding of the need for an inclusion of women in sustainable development policy that highlights their concerns, needs, knowledge, and strengths.

The problematic nature of growth and the omission of women in the Brundtland report led me to a re-examination of the theory surrounding economic development, sustainable development, and women and development, from a feminist perspective. Using elements of WED, ecofeminism, and global feminisms, I established the broad outline of a framework that is based on the principles of equality and non-exploitation,

with two main elements: a transformation of values and economic alternatives. A transformation of values requires the creation of peace, as well as changes in frameworks of knowledge and the political framework. Issues in creating non-exploitative economic structures include establishing an alternative to capitalist development and changing the value of nature and women's work, as well as resource conservation and management, poverty, and population issues.

## **6.2 Rationale and Structure**

The theoretical model of feminist sustainable development provides the basis of the current chapter, and guidelines for alternative development paths in Viet Nam. This chapter will apply some of the features of the feminist sustainable development framework created in Chapter Five to Viet Nam and begin to explore the implications that such a framework will have in the context of Viet Nam. I examine several elements in detail, but the analysis will not be comprehensive. To go through the feminist sustainable development framework's features one by one is beyond the scope of this thesis; that task would be a thesis in itself.

I will consider the three points of contradiction that arose from the analysis in Chapter Four. The failure to focus on women and the assumed need for growth were fundamental flaws in both the Brundtland Commission's objectives for sustainable development and the Vietnamese government's policy

on development. A further weakness in the Vietnamese government policy was the lack of a well-articulated understanding of sustainable development.

The issues of women's roles and the nature of growth will be addressed jointly in a discussion of the feminist sustainable development principles of equality and non-exploitation. While emphasizing the responsibility of the state in creating such a framework, I examine education, growth, and labour as examples of how feminist sustainable development theory can be used in Viet Nam. After this analysis, I will consider poverty and population growth, two of the most serious issues in Viet Nam today, and explain how a feminist sustainable development framework will solve these problems.

A discussion on the opportunity for the Vietnamese government to create a vision of sustainable development serves as a summary of the recommendations of this chapter. The final sections discuss the need for further research and Viet Nam's international role.

This chapter goes beyond the three-strand structure introduced earlier in the thesis by attempting integrate the three strands in a holistic manner.<sup>1</sup> This integration is,

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<sup>1</sup> The role of the policy documents, which were central to Chapter Four, is diminished here. They have served their purpose in explaining the current vision of the Vietnamese government. We know their limits and their vision of the future. The analysis in this chapter has a contemplative and conjectural character as it tries to create an alternative vision for the future.

itself, holistic and diverse -- principles underlying feminist sustainable development.

### **6.3 Equality and Non-Exploitation in Viet Nam**

Equality is a useful concept in the way that the Brundtland report was useful for the previous analysis: it is politically expedient, since it has a growing following throughout the world. Although the current popular conception of equality is misleading, as it tries to fit women into a hierarchical, exploitative system, it does provide a basis that can be broadened and expanded. The feminist sustainable development definition of equality broadens the concept.

Equality and the principle of non-exploitation also fits with the revolutionary ideals on which modern Vietnamese society has been founded. One of the basic principles of the revolution and struggle for independence was liberation from the tyranny of colonialism and oppression. Viet Nam's history includes many years of invasion, oppression and war, so non-exploitation is a concept to which Viet Nam should be able to relate. Although feminist sustainable development theory does not stem from Vietnamese society, elements of it -- like equality and non-exploitation -- have a strong basis in it.

Equality between women and men, one of the fundamental tenets on which feminist sustainable development rests, is guaranteed in the Vietnamese constitution. While in reality, Vietnamese women do not have equality, their status, as

discussed in Chapter Three, is relatively high. The Beijing report reaffirms the government's commitment to this equality, yet recognizes that there remains some distance between goals and practices. A Development Perspective pays lip service to women's equality and dignity (SRV 1993, 11) but does not elaborate on achieving equality. The NPESD aims for "sustainable development with equity" but does not discuss how that equity affects women.

Viet Nam's efforts to achieve sexual equality have been recognized internationally. Viet Nam scored relatively well on the UNDP's Gender Development Index (GDI) in 1996. The UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) "measures the average achievement of a country in basic human capabilities. [It] indicates whether people lead a long and healthy life, are educated and knowledgeable and enjoy a decent standard of living." The GDI is the HDI adjusted for inequality between men and women: "The greater the gender disparity in basic capabilities, the lower a country's GDI compared with its HDI" (UNDP 1995, 73). Viet Nam was placed at 121 out of 174 countries, in the HDI ranking (for comparison purposes, Canada ranked first). When these figures were adjusted for gender, Viet Nam's rank rose by two points, (Canada fell by one point).<sup>2</sup> In terms of the HDI, Viet Nam ranks as "medium,"

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<sup>2</sup> The GDI scale includes less countries than the HDI scale. The GDI is done for only 137 countries, the HDI for 174. While Viet Nam placed 121st on the HDI scale, it placed 93rd when the HDI scale was adjusted for only 137 countries. Thus, its GDI ranking of 91st meant a gain of two places. The

which is a good sign. Although there is a distance to go in terms of achieving equality, Viet Nam's progress in that direction must be recognized and praised. And, according to the Human Development Report, no country in the world has achieved equality (UNDP 1995, 175).

Equality among all the peoples of Viet Nam appears to be less clearly enshrined in policy. The treatment of ethnic minorities is questionable (see Chapter Three). Ethnic minorities are not given much consideration in any of the government policy documents examined previously and, if they are, it is in an assimilative manner. Programmes are occasionally mentioned that target minority groups for essential needs. Overall, however, Viet Nam's policy on ethnic minorities needs to be re-examined and the roles of the minority groups in sustainable development need to be worked out.

A state responsible to its people, as discussed in Chapter Five, is an essential element in creating a society based on equality and non-exploitation. The Vietnamese state has an opportunity to build on the ideals of its revolutionary history, and the principles enshrined in its constitution. Not only does it need to avoid giving control to capital, especially foreign capital -- the trap of the global market economy and the trend towards globalization -- but it needs to

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difference between HDI and GDI for countries ranges between -30 and +13.

take a leadership role in creating an enabling environment for the values of a feminist sustainable development framework to be implemented. The state should engage other actors such as communities, NGOs, and the Women's Union, to work towards this overarching goal. Three areas in which the state has responsibility for ensuring a framework of equality and non-exploitation are education, growth, and labour; I will now examine each of these areas in more detail.

### 6.3.1 Education

Equality in education for women and men is important for achieving and maintaining equality in society. This is not a new idea. WID, for example, also calls for equality in education, as do other non-transformative development policies and programmes. What makes a feminist sustainable development framework different is the broader nature of equality. Its goals transcend attempts to ensure that all women receive a basic education, to try to increase secondary and tertiary enrolment figures for women, to encourage women to study in non-traditional fields. These goals are not incompatible with feminist sustainable development of course.

As discussed in Chapter Three, Vietnamese women do not have the same educational opportunities as men, and are suffering disproportionately more from spending cuts to education that have resulted from the reforms. Viet Nam's trend of declining spending on education is alarming and must

be reversed, and the inclusion of women in the education system must be made a priority, as well as the structural changes discussed above.

Feminist sustainable development theory advocates the importance of giving women's knowledge a central role in society. There is little evidence that Vietnamese society values women's knowledge, aside perhaps from women's knowledge on domestic matters, since women's role in the family and home is valued. Feminist sustainable development theory suggests integrating women's knowledge into education and training systems. The educational curriculum should serve the interests of women, and this would be done by adapting the content of the educational curriculum to include increased awareness of environment and women's issues, and increased relevance for women.

Ideas in peace education provide some insight into what education in a feminist sustainable development framework might look like. Peace education is humanistic and strives to transform the human condition, and feminism is "the most fully human current perspective on peace and peace education" (Reardon 1988, 9). Peace education fosters values of peace, justice, human rights, and equality, and stresses co-operation over competition.<sup>3</sup> The principle of non-exploitation must also be made an integral part of the educational curriculum,

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<sup>3</sup> For further reading on peace education, see Brock-Utne (1985) and Hicks (1988).

laying the foundation for societal change. An education system based in non-exploitation would consider it a priority to educate the students to become good and active citizens; its goals would be more than simply training people for the workforce.

Viet Nam has a long history and rich culture. It should be looking to its own cultural resources -- especially women's knowledge and that of the ethnic minorities. These traditional Vietnamese cultural forms will be valuable in changing social and economic systems and structures. Just as I am advocating that Viet Nam does not adopt Western values of capitalism, materialism, consumerism, fashion and rock music, I am also not suggesting that it follow a Western concept of peace education. The values that I suggest are guidelines; the people of Viet Nam need to look into their own heritage to find their concepts of justice, equality, and peace.

### 6.3.2 Growth

Economic growth does not necessarily mean the extraction and exploitation of natural resources. Growth can be redefined to make better use of existing products, systems, and structures. It will mean changing how we value natural resources. One current theory that addresses this issue suggests including environmental "externalities" into accounting systems. In this manner, natural resources would be valued at their true worth (as much as that can be

quantified); non-renewable resources and pollution-producing processes would become much more expensive and therefore used less.

One aspect of changing the nature of growth involves changing how nature -- natural resources, natural processes -- are valued in the economic system. As discussed in Chapter Five, disagreement exists on this point; Waring considers "environmental economics" to be inappropriate for a non-patriarchal feminist system, because it assigns monetary value to something that should not be commodified. Nevertheless I believe that giving nature a value is better than the current system. Suggesting a change that is so radical so that there is no need for environmental economics, that nature's value will be inherently recognized, is too impractical at this point. Ecological economics can be considered as an interim step to the ideal.

If placing monetary value on nature, and making it expensive to exploit nature for economic growth is the only way to halt the unsustainable use of resources, then it becomes a necessity.

Sustainable economic development depends on using renewable resources sustainably, that is, not exhausting them beyond the point where they can regenerate, and not using non-renewable resources. Such a change would have significant implications for industries based on mining and oil and gas. Viet Nam is planning to exploit its offshore oil and gas

reserves as part of its development strategy. It also has a mining industry. These industries would not be a part of a feminist sustainable development framework.

Energy is another sector which would change drastically, if non-renewable resources could no longer be used. Alternative energy sources based on renewable resources such as solar energy, wind, and tidal power would have to be developed. Pollution in any industrial, agricultural, energy, or transportation activity is also unacceptable in a feminist sustainable development framework.

Agriculture, fishing, and forestry are potentially sustainable activities, if they are managed correctly. Since Viet Nam is still primarily agricultural, it should focus on developing these areas sustainably. Use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides must be changed. Intercropping, crop rotation, natural pesticides and fertilizers are some strategies for organic, ecologically sustainable agriculture (Friesen 1992, 12). Returning to traditional knowledge and incorporating the ethnic minorities' knowledge of farming systems are also important components.

These changes will result in an emphasis on smaller scale, subsistence-oriented agriculture and industry. The role of trade and export will have to be seriously reconsidered, since much of it is currently centred around the use of non-renewable resources. Also, producing large enough quantities of agricultural products for export, such as rice,

which is the primary export, may be difficult to do sustainably.

### 6.3.3 Labour

Now I will explore some of the implications of an equal, non-exploitative economic system of labour. This exploration will include the changes within women's unpaid reproductive and domestic labour as well as labour exploitation in the formal sector.

In a non-exploitative system, the dichotomy will disappear between productive labour and household or reproductive labour, considered unproductive in the capitalist system. This change will affect women's lives significantly, because their double burden of work at home and in society will be reduced once women's labour is valued to the same extent as men's.

The value of household labour does not appear to be a central issue to Vietnamese women in comparison to its importance in a feminist sustainable development framework (Tran and Allen 1992). An example of the lack of importance attached to this issue is evident in the Beijing report. In fact, the Beijing report encourages "the development of activities around food processing in order to decrease the demands on women for household chores" (20). This statement does not suggest sharing housework between women and men, or women receiving pay for their work. Tran and Allen report

that housework is not considered "suitable" for men (1992, 14).

In an equal society, the nature of domestic labour would be different. Perhaps housework would be shared equally between women and men; certainly it would be considered an economically productive activity. "Women's work" of any kind would no longer be exploited, resulting in equal value for work regardless of gender.

Outside the home, there would also be a change in the nature of work relationships. Any form of labour exploitation is inconsistent with a feminist sustainable development framework. The exploitation of paid labour (men's as well as women's), is an increasingly important issue in Viet Nam. This exploitation has parallels in most Asian countries, especially the NICs. Most rapidly industrializing Asian countries contain sweatshops where women, children, and men are paid subsistence wages or less for long work hours. These workers are subjected to dangerous working conditions and physical and mental abuse, in order to manufacture cheap products. Foreign investors want cheap sources of labour (Schwarz 1996a) and threaten to move their factories if this labour becomes too expensive.

It is alarming that the Viet Nam government is proud to advertise the high number of cheap labour opportunities to prospective investors. In A Development Perspective, the section on Viet Nam's development endowments states that Viet

Nam's "low wage levels and ... large surplus of labour" give it an important advantage and "powerful incentive" for investment in labour intensive industries (SRV 1993, 13). This sounds like an invitation for exploitation! Exploitation of labour, whether women's or men's, is incompatible with an equality-based feminist sustainable development.

#### **6.4 Poverty and Population**

So far I have examined issues which I believe are central to a feminist sustainable development framework. Now I will consider the two most pressing challenges facing Viet Nam, according to the Vietnamese government: poverty and a growing population.

Poverty is generally considered to be the foremost development problem, and population the foremost environmental problem. These problems are created by and tied to the existing inequitable and exploitative system in ways discussed in Chapter Five. A feminist sustainable development approach would solve both problems. The mainstream looks for narrow solutions, such as increasing economic growth for the first and birth control measures (often translating as control of women's fertility), but in fact the solutions lie in a holistic perspective.

The elements of an alternative economic system based on the principles of equality and non-exploitation discussed in

this chapter would solve both poverty and population problems. Poverty and population are interconnected issues. Since feminist sustainable development solves inequality, the underlying cause of poverty, poverty is eliminated with a redistribution of wealth and power. Population growth problems are also caused by systemic inequalities, such as unequal access to resources, that would be resolved by a feminist sustainable development framework.

It is not within Viet Nam's ability to resolve the international dimensions of poverty and the inequalities between the North and South. It is, however, within the Vietnamese government's capability to facilitate a more equitable distribution of wealth within the country, and ultimately, to solve poverty.

#### **6.5 Towards A Clearer Vision of Sustainable Development**

The previous sections addressed two of the faults of the Brundtland Commission and the Vietnamese policy documents discussed in Chapter Four, namely the roles of women and growth. The third weakness discussed in Chapter Four was the Vietnamese government's poor understanding of what sustainable development is.

The feminist sustainable development framework presented in Chapter Five, combined with the preliminary analysis of this chapter, provides a solid basis for the Vietnamese government to develop a sound understanding and well-

articulated vision of sustainable development suitable for its specific context. The policy will be based on the principles of equality and non-exploitation, and will be transformative.

#### **6.6 The Need for Further Research**

The preceding discussion has focused on how adopting a feminist sustainable development approach would change aspects of the economic system. The social and cultural implications are equally important, but this analysis must come from the people of Viet Nam, or perhaps from collaboration between Vietnamese and other researchers. There is a definite need for a re-examination by Vietnamese of their culture and values, especially with respect to environmental and women's issues. This re-examination and reflection cannot be carried out by outsiders; it must include an informed choice by the Vietnamese people, grounded in the grassroots level.

The analysis developed from this framework is an alternative approach to that currently imposed by Western economists and corporations. As with any feminist framework, it must engage with local realities. Feminist research must be carried out in the reality of women's lives; their social, ecological, and economic environments, and the relevance of this theory to the details of their lives more clearly established. The researcher must ask appreciate how this theory, rather than the dominant World Bank model, will be useful in shaping their future. This approach encourages

local researchers to ask critical questions about the theory as well as the reality. Feminist sustainable development theory is flexible, which is evident when examining the researching process, because it will adapt the theory into something uniquely relevant to Viet Nam. Concrete research into the relevance of feminist sustainable development theory to Viet Nam is necessary to establish a basis for real transformation to occur.

The analysis in this concluding chapter is a beginning, as well as an end. It suggests some potential implications that feminist sustainable development theory has for Viet Nam's development; indeed, for the development path of any country. It serves as an example of the type of analysis that should be carried out by the Vietnamese government as well as by Vietnamese women and environmentalists. This analysis also suggests directions for further research, including more feminist research in order to make more concrete suggestions for change.

## **6.7 Viet Nam in a Global Context**

This section brings the discussion back to the global level with which I began the analysis in Chapter Two. The recent UN Conferences discussed there addressed the global social, economic, political, and ecological environments. Viet Nam signed these commitments. Viet Nam has signed UN declarations including CEDAW, the Nairobi Forward Looking

Strategies, and the Beijing Declaration; Agenda 21 from the Earth Summit; and the Plan of Action from the Social Summit. In doing so, Viet Nam pledged to uphold their spirit and implement their directives.

Feminist sustainable development takes a global approach to solutions for maldevelopment, because it recognizes that truly just development will not take place without a redistribution of wealth and power between the North and South. This international orientation makes it important to discuss Viet Nam's role in the international context. Environmental issues are global. Air, water, and other ecological systems do not recognize borders. The global context is imperative in any discussion of ecologically sustainable development.

Regional cooperation for environmental issues is also critical. Among Viet Nam's neighbours are the NICs, who are not the best role models for economic development, especially from an ecological perspective. These countries are beginning to adopt environmental policies, however, and attempt to reverse the damage their rapid industrialization has caused. A mutually beneficial relationship based on cooperation could be established between the NICs and Viet Nam. Viet Nam does well on the issues of equality and sustainable development with equity, so Viet Nam could become a role model for the NICs.

International cooperation is discussed in the three

policy documents, A Development Perspective, the NPESD and the Beijing report. The Beijing report calls for the cooperation of the international community to deal with the global concern of women's progress, and expresses Viet Nam's need for assistance from other governments and international organizations. The NPESD articulates this need for international assistance more strongly, as does A Development Perspective.

The documents also indicate a search for a role beyond that of a recipient of aid, which is a positive sign. It is encouraging that Viet Nam is seeking to be active internationally, after many years of isolation. Within a framework based on equality it is disturbing that it sees itself as a recipient of assistance. Viet Nam's potential contribution to the world goes far beyond a "have not" seeking for help from more "advanced" countries; it has the potential to make a positive contribution in providing leadership in feminist sustainable development. This leadership could be strengthened through Viet Nam's adoption of recommendations in this thesis, as well as ongoing research and analysis into feminist sustainable development issues.

The challenge facing Viet Nam is to define a role for itself, as an equal among nations and an example of what a transition in the 21st century could mean. Instead of a transition to an exploitative market system, Viet Nam could lead the way to another type of change. It could transform

itself using a just, equitable feminist sustainable development framework.

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<sup>1</sup> I am unsure whether Vietnamese and Chinese names used in Western publications are written in their proper order or in Western style. I will consider them to be written Asian-style unless informed otherwise.

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