



Executive Board of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

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Field visits

Report of the field visit of the UN-Women Executive Board Bureau to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

1. Introduction

1. A delegation comprising the President and the four Vice-Presidents of the UN-Women Executive Board conducted a field visit to the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam from the 7 to the 12 December 2014.

2. The objective of the field visit was to gain a first-hand understanding of UN-Women's work at country level and the cooperation with the Government of Viet Nam. The visit aimed to gather insight on the extent and ways of cooperation amongst development partners collaborating with UN-Women in Viet Nam. This included inter-agency collaboration under the 'Delivering as One' initiative (DaO) as well as cooperation with civil society organizations (CSOs).

3. The delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Government of Viet Nam for its kind hospitality, and providing the opportunity to discuss gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls with ministers and senior representatives at national and regional levels.

4. The delegation would like to express its gratitude to UN-Women Viet Nam for its warm welcome, UN-Women Viet Nam as well as the UN-Women Executive Board Secretariat team for the well-prepared agenda and the successful implementation of the first-ever field visit of a UN-Women Executive Board Bureau. Furthermore, the delegation highly appreciated the presence of UN-Women's Regional Director, who joined from UN-Women's Regional Office for Asia and the

Pacific in Bangkok. Thematic briefs shared with the delegation prior to its departure, at the beginning of the field visit as well as during the final de-briefing at the end of the visit, were also very helpful.

5. The programme of the visit comprised meetings in the capital Hanoi with government officials, parliamentary representatives, UN agency representatives, the international community and civil society at the national level as well as field visits to project sites in Da Nang and Hue.

(a) In Hanoi, the delegation met with the Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Justice, the Leader of the Supreme Court and the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee for Social Affairs. Meetings were conducted with the UN-Women Country Representative and the country office team, the UN-Women Regional Director and the UN Country Team in Viet Nam. Learning about the DaO initiative included a site visit to the new ‘Green One UN House’; one of the six pillars of the DaO initiative. The delegation also engaged in dialogue with representatives of civil society as well as the international community.

(b) In Da Nang the delegation had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Viet Nam Women’s Union, the Youth Union and the Provincial People’s Committee. The delegation attended a youth club meeting, participated in activities on gender equality and had the chance to witness a community-based violence prevention project.

(c) In Hue, the delegation participated in a roundtable discussion on the gender dimension of disaster risk reduction and climate change with the Viet Nam Women’s Union and the Communal Committee of Floods and Storm Control. It also learned about the work of the Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation on disaster risk adaptation and mitigation among rural communes relating to floods, coastal erosion and rising sea levels. The delegation then engaged in dialogue with women and girls from the community.

2. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in Viet Nam

2.1 Current situation and key challenges

6. The population of Viet Nam is estimated at 89.7 million, with roughly 45,245,000 of the population being female (a male/female gender ratio of 0.98). The 2014 Gender Gap Report ranks Viet Nam 76th out of 142 countries. Detailed breakdown into sub-indexes reveals that Viet Nam is ranked 41st for Economic Participation and Opportunity, 87th for Political Empowerment, 97th for Educational Attainment and 137th for Health and Survival.

7. Viet Nam has made strong normative progress towards achieving gender equality over the past decade. Besides the revision of the Constitution, legislative processes led to the approval of a Law on Gender Equality in 2006, a Domestic Violence Law in 2007, a National Strategy and

National Programme for Gender Equality in 2011, and a National Action Plan on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control in 2014. A revised Labour Code added new provisions guaranteeing equality, non-discrimination and protection of women's labour rights. These laws and strategies aim to raise national awareness on the importance of gender equality and the promotion of women and girls in the social, economic and political arena.

8. Despite the good progress made, challenges in achieving gender equality in Viet Nam remain. The Government of Viet Nam is concerned about the reduction in gender specific budget allocations and adverse social impacts related to the slowdown in economic growth in recent years. Adverse social impacts include bankruptcies and job losses, a return of many workers to the informal sector as well as higher levels of work related migration. Women are disproportionately affected, and today there are more women concentrated in vulnerable jobs that are low paying, likely to have no formal contract and no access to labour protection.

9. Although the gender pay gap is lower than that of many other countries in the region, Viet Nam is among the few countries that have seen a widening wage gap in recent years. Even though the 2003 Land Law guarantees equal rights of women to hold land use certificates, the Government of Viet Nam reported that a gender gap in the number of land use certificates issued still persists. Despite the high rate of participation in agriculture, women from ethnic minorities tend to have less access to land due to prevailing local customs.

10. Political participation of women within governmental structures is maintained at a relatively high level, with significant increases specifically at the sub-national level, and good progress made at the provincial level. However, the Government of Viet Nam identified that women's representation among the main political decision-making bodies remains low and ethnic minorities are underrepresented throughout the system.

11. Often women and girls are doubly burdened with unpaid domestic care duties and income generating work. The high prevalence rates of domestic as well as other kinds of violence against women and girls in Viet Nam is also alarming, and the perception of domestic violence as a 'private family issue', with reconciliation prescribed in the law as the first course of action, has led to limited reporting of cases of abuse.

12. Deep rooted discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes lead to a continuously increasing imbalance in the sex ratio at birth. The widespread practice of prenatal sex selection in favour of boys, has contributed to Viet Nam having the second lowest sex ratio at birth indicator in the world. Although good progress has been made in reducing maternal mortality over the past decades, the Government of Viet Nam identified remaining challenges in health care provision. The remoteness of health centers, poor quality of service provision, inability to pay for services and preference for female health care workers are observed as obstacles in health system utilization particularly by the ethnic minority population.

13. Good progress has been made in eliminating gender disparity in access to primary and lower secondary education, but inequalities in access to education remain high among different ethnic groups and across regions. This is also reflected in the lower literacy rate among girls compared to boys in ethnic minority populations.

14. Viet Nam is highly vulnerable to natural disasters and the impact these have on the most vulnerable members of the communities, including women and girls. The Government of Viet Nam has recognised the magnitude of climate-related disasters and shows commitment to disaster risk reduction and climate change response at the national and regional level. Awareness of the importance of including a gender perspective in the national action plans on disaster risk reduction is increasing, but implementation remains challenging.

2.2 Collaboration between the Government of Viet Nam and UN-Women

15. The Government of Viet Nam has identified specific focus areas in its work towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020) and National Programme on Gender Equality (2011-2015). These include strengthening women's representation in leadership and management, narrowing the gender gap in the labour and employment, equal participation in education and training, equal access to health care service, equality in family life including elimination of violence against women and girls.

16. The Government of Viet Nam collaborates with UN-Women in the thematic areas of women's leadership and participation, disaster risk reduction and climate change, enhancing women's economic empowerment, ending violence against women and girls and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting.

17. UN-Women operates in Viet Nam within the framework of the DaO initiative. DaO in Viet Nam has moved from the planning and standard setting stage to the next phase of getting together to jointly deliver results on national priorities, and Viet Nam is now considered a second generation DaO country, striving for increased system-wide coherence. DaO in Viet Nam brings together the expertise, experience and capacities of 15 resident and 2 non-resident UN agencies. The DaO initiative is based on six pillars: One plan, One budget, One leader, One set of management practices, One voice and the 'Green One UN House'. UN-Women's collaboration with the Government of Viet Nam is embedded within the 'One Plan for 2012-2016'; the single programme framework for all UN agencies in Viet Nam. The 'One Plan for 2012-2016' integrates gender equality as a cross-cutting issue and incorporates an outcome focusing on gender equality with two specific outputs.

18. UN-Women supports the Government of Viet Nam in improving the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Viet Nam's international and domestic commitments on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. UN-Women provided technical support to the development of Viet Nam's National Strategy (2011-2020) and National Programme on Gender Equality (2011-2015). The collaboration aims at ensuring the incorporation of the gender equality

principles as outlined in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), in legislative revisions and amendments as well as respective reporting to the CEDAW Committee. To support the Government of Viet Nam with preparation of its National Report reviewing 20 years of implementation of the BPfA, UN-Women mobilized technical inputs of the UN Gender Joint Programming Group (JPG) member agencies. Furthermore, UN-Women facilitated a number of joint advocacy events to highlight progress in implementing the BPfA.

19. Within the framework of ‘One UN’, UN-Women Viet Nam is working with the Government and other key partners on increasing and broadening understanding of violence against women, including sexual harassment in the workplace and public spaces, trafficking of women and girls, sex-selective abortions, and early and forced marriage. Approaches seek to strengthen the justice sector response to violence against women. Research commissioned to build a better understanding of the barriers to women’s access to justice has provided findings which are being used as the foundation of high level policy advice and development of training programmes for the justice sector. UN-Women is testing models for primary prevention of violence against women at the community level. Through activities such as educational programmes in schools, increased media awareness, and direct work with individuals and communities, efforts are being made to change the fundamental inequalities which contribute to the perpetuation of violence against women.

20. UN-Women advocates for the adoption and implementation of legislation, policies and strategies to strengthen women's economic empowerment and access to resources. In this context special attention is being given to: protecting the rights of female migrant workers, the development of social protection policies which are responsive to the different risks and vulnerabilities of women and men, and the promotion of gender equality in the business sector by teaching business leaders how to use the Women’s Empowerment Principles.

21. Within the UN country team in Viet Nam, UN-Women is the convener of the Joint Programming Group on Gender, one of eight Joint Programming Groups that improve joint planning, monitoring and reporting on the ‘One Plan 2012-2016’. The Gender JPG is also tasked with supporting other JPGs with addressing gender inequality throughout their joint work-plans. Mainstreaming gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls into all UN programmes in Viet Nam will reflect accountabilities according to the System-wide Action Plan for Implementation of the CEB United Nations System-wide Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.

22. In 2012 UN-Women initiated the establishment of an informal “Ambassadors and Heads of Agencies Group on Gender Equality”. Co-chaired by the UN Resident Coordinator and the Ambassador of Sweden, the Group formulates and advocates common positions of the international community on gender related topics and engages in high level policy discussions with the Government.

23. During the period 2014-2015, the UN-Women Viet Nam country office operates with a budget of approximately \$4 million. Programmatic focus is set on policy advocacy, technical support and capacity development of government partners and CSOs. High level policy advice and technical support to establish resilient mechanisms and sustainable structures for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is largely concentrated in Hanoi with all the line ministries present in the capital. Capacity development training and workshops are further rolled out at the sub-national level, targeting government officials, CSO-representatives and beneficiaries at the regional and provincial levels in the central and southern provinces of Viet Nam.

24. In addition to the main budget, the Viet Nam country office is implementing an in-country component of a Regional Programme on Violence-Against Women (\$100,000), providing technical and monitoring support for the UN-Women Fund for Gender Equality grant to 'LIGHT'-Institute (\$200,000 for 2013-2015), and monitoring support for the UN Trust Fund to End Violence Against Women grant to 'Plan' Viet Nam (\$988,688 for 2014-2016).

3. Observations and recommendations to UN-Women

25. Good progress has been made on the strengthening of the legal framework for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. However, the implementation of laws and policies remains challenging. The recognition of gender equality as a cross-sectoral issue that requires the attention of all government sectors is relatively new in Viet Nam. UN-Women's support in gender mainstreaming should specifically target traditional attitudes towards women and girls to ensure that development projects deliver more sustainable results. Scarce human and financial resources, as well as inadequate coordination and implementation capacity, restrain a more effective realization of laws and policies. To meet the demand for strengthened policy and implementation capacity formulated by the Government of Viet Nam, UN-Women will need to continue to provide high-level policy advice to ensure the sustainable integration of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in all future national planning.

26. High-level government representatives at national and regional levels in Viet Nam noted that the Government of Viet Nam intends to take additional measures for increased implementation of the national gender strategy. Government representatives identified the need for targeted capacity-building assistance to follow-up and ensure effective implementation of national laws, strategies and plans. Support from UN-Women is needed to meet the training needs formulated by the Government of Viet Nam and to provide respective capacity building. This assistance should include *inter alia* continuous support to line ministries in the development of planning, monitoring and reporting tools and guidelines to underpin meeting the specific needs of women and girls.

27. With its attainment of middle income country status in 2010, Viet Nam has experienced a decrease in overall official development assistance. The international community is largely reducing or ending its commitments in Viet Nam, which is leading to a funding gap in many

development sectors. In light of this, ensuring continuity of funding, especially funds earmarked for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, poses a challenge to the achievements made so far, and must be kept in mind in all resource mobilization considerations. The decrease of bilateral assistance is expected to shift responsibilities towards the Government of Viet Nam and other actors including the UN and CSOs. UN-Women is supporting the Government of Viet Nam in building awareness amongst line ministries of the need to allocate sufficient resources to gender equality programmes and to strengthen the capacity for gender responsive planning and budgeting. UN-Women will need to ensure that it has the capacity to provide both, high-level policy advice and targeted capacity building to support the ambitions of the Government of Viet Nam.

28. At the same time, UN-Women is facing significant expectations from various development partners in Viet Nam and requires adequate funding itself. UN-Women will need to assess whether central funding allocation decisions match the increase in demand given the transition of Viet Nam to middle income country status. The delegation recommends that UN-Women continues to broaden its partnerships, including those with the private sector. Furthermore, UN-Women should consider the lessons learned from its support to the Government of Viet Nam in this specific transition situation, and how these lessons can be instructive as other countries prepare to reach middle income country status in the next 5-10 years.

29. To promote the leadership and participation of women in disaster risk reduction and climate change, UN-Women supports the Viet Nam Women's Union programme of work with women and girls in disaster-prone areas. The programme aims to strengthen the role of local women in disaster risk reduction and management by improving their knowledge and skills. Specific capacity building is provided to strengthen resilience and disaster preparedness in order to allow women's full and formal participation in the Committees for Floods and Storm Control, and to include gender sensitive adaptations to climate change and natural disaster responses. The delegation recommends that UN-Women ensures that in all endeavors related to disaster risk reduction and climate change, specific implications related to gender are considered with a long-term perspective.

30. Greater representation of civil society in policy dialogues and decision making processes is thought to additionally promote the voice of women and girls, including the most vulnerable and marginalized. UN-Women fosters cooperation between CSOs to build a strong women's movement. UN-Women's collaboration with non-governmental stakeholders focuses mainly on three women's rights networks: the Gender and Community Development Network (GenComNet), the Network for Empowerment of Women (NEW) and the Domestic Violence Prevention Network (DOVIPNET). The delegation recommends that UN-Women continues to serve as facilitator of substantive dialogues between the Government of Viet Nam and CSOs and advocates for more partnerships that integrate CSO consultation into the regular planning processes of national policies and laws.

31. The engagement of men and boys in gender equality is crucial for the long-term sustainability of the results achieved in Viet Nam. In this respect the launch of the “HeForShe” campaign, UN-Women’s campaign to engage men and boys is expected to help the removal of social and cultural barriers that prevent women and girls from achieving their potential, and the momentum should be used to encourage Vietnamese men and boys to become agents of change.

32. The delegation recommends that in all collaborations with the development partners of Viet Nam, UN-Women facilitates exchange of lessons learned and best practices, and also leverages the regional expertise in this area of the Regional Office of UN-Women in Bangkok. Despite significant differences between countries, several contextual similarities can be observed throughout the region. An increased degree of knowledge transfer will positively contribute to the further implementation of the strategies and approaches towards gender equality.

33. Working together in the ‘Green One UN House’ and making use of innovative concepts like functional work clusters will promote teamwork amongst agencies, contribute to enhanced efficiency, reduce transaction costs and promote coherence of UN approaches. The potential of the ‘Green One UN House’ to increase the coherence of all UN activities should be fully leveraged to create better results and greater impact for beneficiaries.

34. This field visit to Viet Nam was the first ever field visit undertaken by a UN-Women Executive Board Bureau. The opportunity for direct dialogue with the Government of Viet Nam and all the associated development partners was highly appreciated by the President and Vice-Presidents of the Executive Board. The objective of the field visit, gaining a first-hand understanding of UN-Women’s cooperation with the Government of Viet Nam and its work at the country level, has been fulfilled beyond expectations. The good collaboration between the Government of Viet Nam and UN-Women, the specific strategic considerations of the UN’s efforts to improve effectiveness through the DaO initiative, as well as the context of Viet Nam’s middle income status, aided greatly in meeting the objectives of the field visit. The insights and understanding gathered by the delegation during the field visit will allow UN-Women to refine its collaboration with the Government of Viet Nam and for the delegation to incorporate this expertise into future discussions at the Executive Board. The delegation recommends that, where appropriate, the UN-Women Executive Board Bureau considers undertaking further field visits.

35. The delegation is confident that the excellent cooperation between the Government of Viet Nam and UN-Women will continue to strengthen the capacity of the Government of Viet Nam to implement its international and domestic commitments to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls including the most vulnerable.

36. The delegation believes that this strategic cooperation will: promote gender responsive planning and budgeting; enhance the formulation and implementation of legislation, policies and strategies designed to further strengthen women's economic empowerment; work to end gender

based violence and; promote leadership and participation of women in decision making processes at all levels, including in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.