

REVIEW OF THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT AND THE PERFORMANCE OF THE VIETNAM WOMEN'S UNION IN THE 2007-2012 TERM

I. REVIEWING THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Upholding the glorious traditions of Vietnamese women, over the past five years, together with the entire Party, people, and armed forces, women nationwide have made great efforts to overcome challenges. Vietnamese women have participated dynamically, creatively, and actively in patriotic emulation movements, making a significant contribution to the overall achievements of the country. The emulation movement “*Women study actively, work creatively and nurture happy families*” has been increasingly drawing wide attention from all women. This movement has been attached to the campaign “*Learning and following Ho Chi Minh's moral example*” and concretized in emulation movements in each branch and locality, creating qualitative changes in the women's movements in every area of social life.

Accounting for 51.37% of the rural workforce¹, women play an important role in agricultural production and the building of a new countryside. Despite the continuous impact of climate change, natural disasters and epidemics, women have overcome difficulties, enthusiastically engaging in production, proactively applying technical and technological achievements in production, shifting plant-animal structure in agriculture, as well as expanding spheres of business, significantly contributing to agricultural development, hunger elimination and poverty reduction. Women have been building a new countryside, ensuring national food security, preserving the country's position among a large group of agricultural exporters (especially its position as the world's second-largest rice exporter), and making a great contribution to economic growth and the assurance of social security and stability in the country.

Female labor continues to account for a high share of labor in processing, garments, textile and footwear manufacturing, commercial industry and services. Women have been increasingly involved in economic sectors requiring high-level professional, technical and technological skills. Women have been proactively engaged in the movement to promote technical innovations, incessantly striving to enhance their professional knowledge and skills, notwithstanding having to work more shifts or hours. Women are contributing to the production of increasingly diversified, high quality products, gaining trust among customers, meeting domestic demands and expanding foreign markets, increasing export volumes, and enhancing the country's economic potential.

Given the impact of the global financial crisis and economic recession on Vietnam's economy, women entrepreneurs have been dynamic and creative in overcoming challenges to maintain and develop their businesses. Women-owned enterprises (making up 25% of the total) and women-owned home businesses (more than 3 million households²) have created jobs for tens of thousands of workers and have actively participated in social and humanitarian activities.

Women have produced significant educational, vocational and scientific-technological achievements over the past five years. Accounting for an overwhelming proportion of teachers and lecturers, particularly in primary and secondary education, women in the education and training field have launched several emulation movements such as “*Teach well, learn well*” and “*Good at school tasks, good at housework*”, contributing to the improvement in the peoples' level of education and the development of the nation's human resources. Despite difficult working

¹ Source: Vietnam labour and employment survey 2010, General Statistics Office (GSO).

² Source: Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry 2011.

conditions, female teachers in remote and isolated areas have remained with their classes and schools in the spirit of “all for our beloved students”. Women and girl children have enjoyed more equal opportunities in access to education and training. The country’s female literacy rate has reached approximately 92%; the number of girl students leaving school has been reduced; female students accounted for over 50% of the total enrollment in universities and colleges; and female students accounted for 61.6% of the total students coming first in university entrance tests and obtaining the highest scores in graduation exams³. The contingent of female intellectuals has been continuously enhanced in terms of both quantity and quality and has become younger and younger, making up 39.7% of master’s degree holders, 21.4% of doctoral degree holders, 10.27% of professorships and 25.78% of associate professorships awarded in the past five years. Women have become more actively and proactively involved in scientific and technological activities, conducting many research projects that serve as the basis for policy-making and which are applicable to production and practical activities, bringing about socio-economic achievements in various fields.

Together with the country’s medical achievements, women’s health has continuously improved. Women’s life expectancy has risen to 75.6 years old, 3.6 years higher than in 2007. New health care policies have enabled women to have better access to health care services, particularly reproductive healthcare. With over 61%⁴ of total employees, women in health services have participated in the movement “a medical doctor as a gentle mother”, which made great strides in improving professional capacities and medical ethics, making significant contributions to caring for and protecting people’s health, especially that of women and children.

The promotion of culture, information, sports, and tourism has helped women to improve their cultural lives. Women have played an important role in upholding national cultural traditions and introducing Vietnam’s image to international friends, thus drawing more tourists to Vietnam. Women have become increasingly involved in such fields as media, publishing, literature and the arts, and have participated in almost all high-level performance sports competitions, obtaining many medals in national, regional and international competitions. Gender bias concerning the traditional roles of women and men has changed to some extent; and there have been more images showing confident women in various fields of society.

In the family, women’s roles, position and contributions have been significantly improved. Holding an important role in building a happy family, women have actively worked to generate income, effectively organized the lives of their families and maintained the cultural traditions of Vietnamese families. Even with the remaining difficulties in the family, millions of women have worked hard, with all their love and responsibility, in order to take care of and educate their children and grandchildren, becoming the spiritual support for their family members.

In the political field, women have become increasingly active and proactive in exercising their rights as citizens and have been involved in different forms of direct democracy in their communities. The number of female officials in certain fields has increased in terms of quantity and quality. The numbers of women members in Party committees at the commune and district levels and in the People’s Councils at all levels has increased; the percentage of women deputies in the 13th National Assembly is 24.4% and women public servants in state administrative bodies from the district to the central level are 31% of the total. Women members in Party committees, elected state bodies, and governmental administrative agencies at all levels have made active contributions to the leadership and management of the country, various sectors, and localities.

³ Source: Ministry of Education and Training 2011

⁴ Source: Vietnam General Population and Housing Survey 2009, GSO.

Women officials and public servants have strived to excel in public affairs while still caring for their families. Moreover, they have been actively enhancing their education, professional skills, and developing political dedication and morality, having successfully accomplished their assigned tasks.

Women have been actively involved in opposing schemes of “peaceful evolution”, maintaining social order and security, preventing and combating crime and negative social trends, and protecting national sovereignty and security. They have made significant contributions to people-to-people relations. In the spirit of emulation for national security, women in the armed forces have continued to advance revolutionary traditions, being ingenious and brave and striving to successfully implement their tasks. Women working in foreign affairs have been active and proactive, making practical contributions in the field of foreign relations and international cooperation, helping to enhance the position of Vietnam in the international arena.

Such proud achievements emphasize that the emulation movement “*Women study actively, work creatively and nurture happy families*” implemented in connection with the campaign “*Learning and following Ho Chi Minh’s moral example*” and other movements and campaigns launched by branches at various levels, have created an atmosphere of lively emulation among women of all walks of life nation-wide. Practical and comprehensive in scope, these emulation movements have drawn the fervent participation of women and have achieved a momentum for women to make active contributions to the successful implementation of national socio-economic development tasks. Among nearly 13 million women who signed up to participate in the emulation movement throughout the entire term, more than 11 million met all three criteria of the movement, and 2,419 had the title “*Outstanding Vietnamese Woman for five years*” bestowed upon them.

Though having made such great efforts and contributions, women still face numerous *difficulties and challenges*, which have direct impact on the development of women and the fulfillment of the goal of gender equality:

Women still have fewer opportunities for studying and increasing their knowledge and professional skills. Women account for a large share of the workforce, however, they still lack advanced technical skills, preventing them from meeting the requirements of the period of accelerated industrialization, modernization, and integration. Only 11.1%⁵ of female workers hold professional certificates and degrees, and the percentage is particularly low among rural, middle-aged and ethnic minority female workers. 42.9% of women are engaged in manual labor (compared to 36.2% of male workers⁶).

Gaps in income and living standards among women and regions are still large. Female workers in industrial and processing zones, female migrant workers, etc., have unstable jobs, low incomes, and below-standard living conditions. Female peasants have experienced a shortage of work and have found it hard to change their jobs when their land is allocated for other uses. They have little time to rest and take care of themselves, even after giving birth. Ethnic minority women, those in remote areas, and disadvantaged women (such as poor, disabled and single women) are faced with various difficulties in their daily lives and enjoy few opportunities to access information, education and training, and the social security system. Moreover, environmental pollution, food contamination, and epidemics are on the rise, affecting women’s health and living standards while adequate conditions for health care are not in place. Gender imbalance at birth has emerged. Abortion, particularly among teenagers, is at an alarming level; and the HIV infection rate tends to increase

⁵ Source: Vietnam General Population and Housing Survey 2009, GSO.

⁶ Source: Labour Force Survey 2009, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs.

quickly among women (from 19.65% of the total HIV infected in 2006 to 31% in 2011⁷). Policies providing favorable conditions and assistance to help women play a role in society and at the same time take care of their families are inadequate. Due attention has not been given to family services and social welfare in support of families and women. There are not enough kindergartens and nursery schools in almost all of the localities and industrial zones (only 18% of under-36-month children have access to such schools⁸). These all present great difficulties and challenges to families, and particularly to mothers.

Male chauvinism still persists in society. Traditional cultural and moral values have been eroded. Domestic violence, school violence, human trafficking, violation of dignity and sexual violence against women and children remain pressing concerns. There are segments of women that tend to pursue a lifestyle of seeking material possessions and enjoyment without being willing to work. Incidents of women violating laws and committing crimes are on the rise. Unlawful group complaints involving women still persist in certain localities.

There are still difficulties and shortcomings in recruiting, training, hiring and promoting women. Female personnel work still faces various difficulties and shortcomings. Several goals for the rate of female leaders have not been fulfilled for many terms and the percentages of women cadre has tended to decline, such as women representation at the National Assembly. The women members of the Central Executive Committee in the 11th term accounted for only about 9%; and female representation in the provincial Party Committees in the 2010-2015 term is only 11.3%. The rate of women holding decision-making positions remains low. The percentage of female presidents of People's Committees and People's Councils at all levels in the 2011-2016 term is only 3-4%.

Such difficulties and challenges directly impact women's development and the realization of the objectives for gender equality.

II. REVIEWING THE ACTIVITIES OF THE VIETNAM WOMEN'S UNION IN THE 2007-2012 TERM

1. Communication and education work has achieved encouraging results, helping improve women's knowledge and capacity in all areas

Due attention and guidance has been given by the Women's Unions (WUs) at all levels to the work of motivating and mobilizing women to implement the Party's orientation and the State's policies and laws, particularly those directly related to women, such as Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW of the Politburo on women's work in the period of accelerating national industrialization and modernization, the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control etc. Incorporated into emulation movements, the campaign "*Learning and following Ho Chi Minh's moral example*" has achieved practical and concrete outcomes, particularly and notably thriftiness and activities to take care of disadvantaged women. Methods for the dissemination of laws have been developed and expanded in many provinces and cities. More legal educators and outreach workers have been added and legal consulting centers have been established in a number of localities. The implementation of the sub-project "*Communicate and disseminate laws to rural and ethnic minority women in the 2008-2012 period*" has contributed to the improvement of women's understanding of and compliance with law.

Education about national traditions, patriotism, national pride and moral behavior, and the building of women's image in the period of industrialization and modernization has been given increased

⁷ Source: Ministry of Health, 2011.

⁸ Source: Ministry of Education and Training, 2011.

attention and has been combined with other emulation movements and campaigns launched by the Party, government, Fatherland Front and the VWU itself. The project “*Communicate and educate Vietnamese women's moral behavior in the period of accelerating industrialization and modernization in 2010-2015*” has created important conditions for women to develop themselves, and to maintain and uphold the fine traditions of Vietnamese women.

Communication methods have been increasingly diversified, focusing on community-based communication and direct communication with VWU members and women, and at the same time expanding communication through mass media, publications, exhibitions, etc. The movement to read books and learn through books and newspapers has been actively implemented across all levels of the Women’s Union and among WU staff, members, and women. Many commune-level WUs have built and maintained a women’s bookshelf, communal women’s library, women’s reading room, etc. with a view to, first and foremost, meeting the needs of WU staff at the grassroots in implementing the WU activities and at the same time, simultaneously contributing to improving women’s knowledge and understanding. By the end of 2011, 9,990 commune-level WUs (equivalent to 74.45%) had established a women’s bookshelf. Thanks to the project of distributing the free-of-charge Vietnamese Women’s Newspaper to communal WUs and hamlet WU chapters in the especially disadvantaged areas, access to information has been extended to 1,848 communal WUs and 19,503 hamlet WU chapters in especially disadvantaged areas.

The WU education and communication outlets, such as the Vietnam Women’s Newspaper, Hanoi Women’s Newspaper, Ho Chi Minh City Women’s Newspaper, Women’s Publishing House, Vietnamese Women’s Museum, and the website of the VWU, have gradually been renovated, enhancing the quality of their communication and increasingly accomplishing their function as voices of the VWU. Many municipal and provincial WUs have published a Women’s Bulletin and have taken the initiative in coordinating with mass media agencies to build exclusive pages and columns on women and gender equality in other media. The central WU and municipal/provincial WUs have attached great importance to the compilation and distribution of communication materials and have improved the skills of reporters and communicators, particularly at the grassroots level.

Women’s Unions at all levels have been closely coordinating with the education-training sectors and Border Guards to patiently encourage women and WU staff at the grassroots level in mountainous areas to participate in literacy classes. A number of models of illiteracy eradication have been implemented, such as learning from relatives, family members and the community; combining literacy teaching and education about methods of doing business, cultivation and animal husbandry, child rearing, etc. Due to the great efforts and contributions of WUs at all levels, by the end of this term, more than 54,000 women have become literate.

VWU staffs in many localities have been close to the grassroots, obtaining a thorough understanding of life of and the demands and aspirations of women, actively informing the Party committees and local governments of the urgent issues and aspirations of women and the people. They educate and organize women to realize their rights and obligations as citizens, contributing to the assurance of social security, order and safety.

2. Involvement in the development and supervision of law and policy implementation related to women’s legal rights and legitimate interests has been intensified

The VWU has proactively made proposals and cooperated with ministries and branches in formulating policies and laws relating to women and gender equality including evaluating the implementation of and proposed adjustments to several sections of the 1992 Constitution. A number of its recommendations concerning women and female officials were accepted by the Party and

State and adopted into regulations and policies. The VWU has begun initial steps to propose changes, from a gender perspective, to a number of draft laws such as the Law on Persons with Disabilities, the Labor Code (revised), the Law on Adoption, the Law on Food Safety, the Law on Execution of Criminal Sentences, the Law on Human Trafficking Prevention and Combat, and the Law on the Elderly, to name just a few.

WUs at all levels have taken the initiative in identifying their priorities and supervising the implementation of a number of the Party's orientations, laws and social security policies (including Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW⁹, the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, Decree No. 19/2003/ND-CP¹⁰, policies concerning poverty reduction and vocational training for rural workers, etc.) and participated with a high sense of responsibility in a number of thematic monitoring and supervision activities implemented by state bodies. Through such supervision, shortcomings in the implementation of policies were discovered and timely communicated to the competent agencies for consideration and correction. The results of this supervision served as the foundation for WU involvement in the formulation, social counter-arguments, and proposals of laws, policies, and solutions in each related field.

Adequate importance has been attached to reconciliation, legal counseling, and the resolution of women's complaints. WUs have made persistent recommendations and have participated in activities to protect women's legal rights and legitimate interests. WUs have been active, in coordination with the judicial sector, in providing on-the-spot legal counseling, allowing many WU members and women to access legal counseling and legal aid. WU staffs have effectively participated in grassroots reconciliation groups, contributing to the successful resolution of many cases. In cases involving complex complaints, the WU, together with other competent agencies, has actively participated in achieving settlement.

Closely following Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW of the Politburo, regarding the work of women officials, the WUs have developed a plan of action, actively consulting and proactively finding eligible female candidates and introducing them to be included in the personnel planning for Party Committees. The WUs have participated in political consultation, organized skills training for female candidates to the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels in the term 2011-2016. The WU has prioritized developing and recommending outstanding women to the Party for consideration and admission, contributing to increasing the rate of female Party members nationally to 37.85%¹¹.

Theoretical research and practical review of women's work has been increasingly highlighted at both the central and municipal/provincial levels, focusing on such issues as innovation in the substance and modes of operation of the WUs, issues of the family, economics, labor and employment, female officials, etc. Over the past five years, 15 ministerial-level research projects have been evaluated and certified. The results of this research have been applied in the process of developing orientation and directing the implementation of the WU's tasks and have served as the groundwork for the WUs to propose policy recommendations.

3. Activities to assist women in economic development and poverty reduction have been diversified, practical, and effective, and have obtained remarkable results

⁹ Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW of the Political Bureau dated April 27th, 2007 on the work for women in the period of accelerating industrialization and modernization.

¹⁰ Decree No. 19/2003/ND-CP dated March 7th, 2003 regulating the responsibilities of state administrative agencies at all levels in ensuring the participation of the Vietnam Women's Union at all levels in state management.

¹¹ Source: The Party Central Commission for Organization, 2010.

The work of providing assistance to poor women has been continuously strengthened by WUs, with a focus on quality and effectiveness and with due importance attached to bringing into full play women's internal strengths for the purpose of sustainable poverty reduction. Movements such as "*Women's mutual help in economic development*", "*Help poor women with targeted addresses*", etc., have been continuously promoted over the past years. Together with large scale campaigns, such as building "*Affection Houses*", "*Practice thrift to follow the example of Uncle Ho*", which have been implemented in many creative ways nation-wide with mutual affection including "*Saving rice jars*" and "*Feeding piggy banks*", the movements have created great internal resources equaling over 3,400 billion VND and have provided assistance to more than 5.6 million turns of women for economic development and poverty reduction.

The WU has promoted the mobilization and management of credit, particularly from the Vietnam Bank for Social Policies. By the end of 2011, the total outstanding loans provided under the management of WUs at all levels had reached over 47,000 billion VND, helping more than 21 million women with loans for the development of production and business. The capital entrusted to the WU from the Bank for Social Policies alone amounted to more than 41,000 billion VND, four times higher than at the beginning of the term, and the repayment rate of the borrowers has consistently been as high as 99%. The WU has coordinated with the agricultural and rural development sector to organize training courses and science and technology transfer activities for nearly 10 million women, contributing to the improved effectiveness of capital use and business and production activities by women.

The WU's micro-finance activities have been developed in a professional and sustainable manner, contributing practically to the fulfillment of the poverty reduction goals for women and to accelerating innovation in the way the WU operates. The TYM Fund (Affection Fund) became the first national small-sized financial organization to be licensed. Models for providing indirect loans and strengthening the capacity of micro-finance organizations have been successfully piloted. Micro-finance programmes and projects in several provinces have been merged and put under united management, with a full-time apparatus, in preparation for the establishment of micro-finance organizations. Surveys and analysis of the micro-finance activities of the entire WU system have been implemented annually, serving as the basis for WUs at all levels to improve the quality of program management and policy consultation.

Activities to assist women with production and business, business start-up and development have been innovative, e.g credit provision has been combined with vocational training and business skills training with costs shared by women entrepreneurs, production, business, and marketing cooperatives and associate groups have been set up, and forums for policy mobilization, networking, awards and honors for female entrepreneurs have been regularly conducted in many localities.

We have achieved important results in vocational training through the nation-wide implementation of the project "*Supporting women in vocational training and job creation in the 2010-2015 period*". The WU system of vocational training and job referral establishments has been incorporated in the overall national planning and has been consolidated and developed. Focus has been given to the implementation of vocational training for rural women laborers, not only in the WU vocational training establishments but also through joint-training and mobile classes. Vocational training activities have been organized in a flexible manner and in closer combination with job creation through providing credit and expanding cooperation with different partners to create on-the-spot jobs for female workers. By the end of 2011, WUs at all levels had organized and co-organized vocational training for more than 1.1 million female workers, of which 300,000 trained at the Women's Union vocational training establishments and referred more than 800,000 female workers to jobs.

With great effort and applying various solutions, such as provision of credit combined with provision of knowledge and business experiences, vocational training, job creation, building of economic development models, and assistance with business start-ups, over the past five years the WU has assisted more than 2.7 million poor female-headed households in economic development, nearly 450,000 households of which have risen out of poverty. The WUs have assisted with the construction and repair of 10,713 “*Affection Houses*” for especially disadvantaged women; and helped more than 256,000 women entrepreneurs access loans, etc. This has made important contributions to the country’s achievements in economic development and poverty reduction.

4. Activities to assist women in building prosperous, equal, advanced and happy families have been strengthened

Building prosperous, equal, advanced and happy families is the common goal of almost all the VWU’s programs and activities. The campaign “*Building the family without poverty, without law violation and social evils, without domestic violence, without giving birth to more than 2 children, without having malnourished and school drop-out children; and maintaining clean house, kitchens and surrounding lanes*” (the campaign “*Building the family of 5 Without-s and 3 Clean-s*” for short) has received positive responses from a great number of VWU members and has gradually entered everyday life and become a constructive factor in renovating the operation and mobilization of VWU staff at all levels.

Along with the cooperation of functional branches to implement a number of national target programmes, the WU has developed and carried out a number of projects that focus on the family as the main target with comprehensive approaches for intervention and assistance. The project “*Educating 5 million mothers on good parenting over the 2010-2015 period*” has provided initial assistance to women to improve their awareness, knowledge and skills, and bring about behavioral changes towards scientific child rearing. Education for enhancing knowledge and skills around reproductive health care, population and family planning, child rearing, prevention and control of crime, social evils, epidemics, HIV/AIDS, domestic violence, etc., have always been key focuses, and are integrated into regular meetings of VWU members, clubs, and women’s credit and savings groups, helping women to realize their central role in family building.

WUs at all levels have continued to work closely with police forces in the implementation of Joint Resolution No. 01/2002/NQLT on “*Overseeing and educating children in the family to stay away from crimes and social evils*”; coordinated with the Education and Training sector in the realization of the movement “*Friendly school, active students*”, and the campaign “*Assisting children with schooling*”, etc. Such coordination programmes have made practical contributions to strengthening the families’ role and responsibilities in child rearing and education, and resolving social issues.

The work of providing counseling and support on marriage and the family has been gradually accelerated. Many such initiatives have been developed and replicated, attracting participation by women groups. Typical examples of such initiatives are: building happy families groups, families without negative social issues groups, credit and savings groups with integrated communication on population, reproductive health, gender equality, women’s participation in environmental protection in association with the campaign “*Women nationwide practicing food safety for family and community health*”, intergenerational self-help clubs, etc. New initiatives have been implemented to provide counseling and support on marriage to foreigners, prevention and control of domestic violence, trafficking in women and children, and other social evils, including marriage assistance centres, trusted addresses in the community, Peace House, hotlines, etc. As a first step, these initiatives have met the demands of women’s groups. Such service provision

initiatives as home daycare, transport for children to and from school, care for the elderly, and domestic help have been organized at some WUs, helping to reduce women's housework burden and serving as the basis for the expansion of family-support service models in the upcoming term.

WUs at all levels have mobilized women's participation in the implementation of national defense and security tasks and the army rear support, such as mobilizing for the draft, visiting and offering presents to soldiers, supporting and encouraging families of border, marine and island soldiers; coordinating with Border Guards in activities to protect border security; actively participating in the campaign "*For Homeland territorial waters and islands*", etc. Activities "showing gratitude" and humanitarian activities have been widely and well received by the majority of women, such as mobilizing resources to build the Vietnamese Heroic Mother statue, taking care of Vietnamese Heroic Mothers, and revolutionary martyrs mothers, donating food, clothes, and essential tools to people in disaster-affected areas, etc. Over the term, WUs throughout the country have mobilized and donated a total amount of over 241 billion VND to needy families and disaster-affected people.

5. The content and form of the WU's operations have been continuously innovated; organizational structure has been strengthened; organizational capacity has been increasingly consolidated

Most outstandingly in the last term, WUs at all levels have attached due importance to innovation in how our organization operates, continued effective activities aimed at taking care of women's practical interests and settling newly arising problems faced by women, and innovated and gradually strengthened the implementation of the WU's role of representing and protecting women's legal rights and legitimate interests. Innovation in the WU way of working has continued to bring into full play the WUs' proactiveness and creativity and the women's inner strength; diversified forms of women's assembly; given focused direction; strengthened the work of planning, developing and implementing projects aimed at realizing the objectives of gender quality; and expanded cooperation and coordination with local governments, industries, branches and mass organizations, paying attention to monitoring, supervision, technical assistance and timely review, assessment, and drawing of lessons.

Consolidation of the organizational structure of WUs at all levels has been done in an increasingly cogent manner with feasibility, clear coordination, proper specialization, and overcoming fragmentation. Promulgation of regulations has promoted democracy, resulting in unity and effectiveness of the leadership of the Executive Committee, Presidium/Standing Board and of the management and operations of the WU's standing bodies.

The VWU has focused on consolidation and improving the quality of its operations at the grassroots level with the motto, "*The WUs operate wherever women are*". The WU at the grassroots level has organized itself along the model of a commune WU Executive Committee - Women's chapters - Women's groups. Importance has been attached to the building of suitable outreach models focusing on particular groups of women, such as the elderly, youth, and migrants. Focus has been given to membership expansion from within households and at the same time the improvement of the members' participation. The mobilization of ethnic minority and religious women has gradually grown in depth and new and effective models have been developed.

Issuance of membership cards has been implemented in 67.5% of the communes and in 100% of the provinces and cities, helping consolidate membership management. The payment and collection of WU membership fees and the development of the WU fund have been thoroughly implemented: the number of fee-paying members has reached nearly 89%, and 92.63% of the

commune-level WUs have established their funds. The quality of the operations of grassroots WUs has been heightened; 95% of grassroots WUs have built core member groups; the number of grassroots organizations recognized for strong and outstanding performance reached 98.27%; 297 WU staff members were awarded the title “*Nationally Outstanding Grassroots WU Staff*”. By the end of December 2011, 15,342,302 women had joined WUs, reaching 72.73% of the total women aged 18 and over, up 9.11% compared to the previous term; WU membership covered 80.42% of the households with women aged 18 years old and above.

The unity of the WU has been expanded. The WU supported the establishment of the Vietnam Association for Intellectual Women, piloted the establishment of WUs in non-state enterprises and developed initiatives gathering female workers in economic and processing zones, and piloted initiatives outreaching to overseas Vietnamese women. The system of women entrepreneur’s clubs has been expanded and many provincial clubs have developed into Women Entrepreneurs Associations, creating a basis for the formal establishment of the Vietnam Association of Women Entrepreneurs.

Training and mid-career training of staff members in accordance with their position, title and job requirements has been expanded in scope, diversified and improved in quality. The development and implementation of the project “*Provide training and mid-career training to key staff of district and grassroots WUs in the 2008-2012 period*” has made significant contributions to capacity raising and standardization of district and grassroots WU staff. More than 300,000 WU staff have attended training and mid-career training, significantly contributing to meeting position-based criteria in terms of professional knowledge: 100% of provincial WU presidents, 98.39% provincial WU vice-presidents, and 81.86% key district WU staff have tertiary education and higher (up 23.29%); 62.61% communal WU presidents have intermediate and higher education (up 37.66%).

Inspection work has been done seriously and regularly. Inspections have been intensive, methods of inspection have been innovated to focus on discovering problems, and instructing and assisting those at the grassroots level. WUs have developed new methods in emulation work. Emulation contents have been made a focus, encouraging proactiveness and creativity at all levels. Evaluation and praise has been implemented on a regular basis with transparency, democracy and adherence to regulations.

6. Foreign affairs and international cooperation have achieved significant results, contributing to extensive cooperation and effective implementation of the VWU’s focal tasks.

The VWU’s bilateral relations with women’s organizations and organizations working on women’s issues in other countries have been strengthened through the signing and implementation of national, regional and international cooperation agreements, through solidarity, and through providing donations to assist women in countries heavily affected by disasters. Friendly relationships with women’s organizations in neighboring countries and countries with traditional relationships to Vietnam have been consolidated. Notably, progress has been made in the relations between the VWU and the Laos Women’s Union and the Cambodian Women for Peace and Development. Many border provincial WUs have concluded and implemented cross-border cooperation agreements with women’s organizations in the neighboring country’s provinces, contributing to borderlines of peace and friendship and have coordinated with Border Guards in educating and mobilizing women to participate in the protection of borders and territorial waters.

In multilateral relations, the VWU has participated in regional and international forums in a

proactive and increasingly effective manner, successfully taking the role of host organization and organizing the 14th Assembly of the ASEAN Confederation of Women's Organizations (ACWO) in Hanoi and successfully implementing its membership in the APEC Women Leaders' Network, the Women's International Democratic Federation, the United Nations, etc. We continue to be involved in reviewing the implementation of international commitments related to women's rights and gender equality. Currently the WU has relations with 307 organizations from 66 countries and territories.

External information and communication have been established through various means. External public opinion and struggle in regard to marriages involving foreigners has contributed to the protection of the rights, interests and dignity of Vietnamese women. The WU has taken advantage of appropriate international forums to demand that the United States government be responsible to resolve the consequences of Agent orange/dioxin, particularly in assisting Agent orange/dioxin victims.

The VWU has organized a number of activities accelerating the outreach among Vietnamese women overseas: studying how to organize Vietnamese women overseas, guiding women's organizations overseas on how to run an organization, organizing exchanges, etc.

The mobilization of international resources has been given continuous attention at both the central and provincial levels, contributing practically to implementation of the WU's focal tasks. In the past five years, the Central WU has attracted more than 40 international projects, most of them focused on building new initiatives on gender mainstreaming capacity improvement, empowering elderly women, preventing and controlling gender-based violence, responses to climate change, etc.

III. OVERALL ASSESSMENT AND LESSONS

Over the past five years, upholding the fine traditions of Vietnamese women, women have actively participated in patriotic emulation movements, vigorously pursued learning, made persistent and tenacious efforts, been dynamic and creative in production and in the professions, and have made effective contributions to national economic development, poverty reduction, social security, and the construction and defense of the country. Alongside the country's development, women's knowledge, capacity, role and position in the family and society have been elevated and women's material and spiritual life has been gradually improved.

Closely following the WU's roles, national political tasks, the need for international integration and women's demands and aspirations, the VWU has remained true to its central role in women's work and the promotion of gender equality. The VWU has organized and mobilized women to participate in socio-economic development, in the shaping of a strong and transparent Party and government, and contributed to maintaining political security and social order. The WU has not only addressed essential practical issues and taken care of women but has also made policy recommendations, participated in the formulation, raised public opinion and supervised the implementation of policies related to women and gender equality, protecting women's legal rights and legitimate interests. Its mode of operation has benefitted from innovation. The VWU has seen new development and positive changes have taken place regarding the development of broad unity, the organization's ability to execute its mandate, and bridging the gap between the Party and women. More and more women join the VWU as members and participate in its activities; the organization and the staff have been strengthened, improving the quality of its operation. During the past term, having expanded great efforts, 15 out of 17 goals set forth in the Resolution of the 10th National Women's Congress have been achieved and, indeed, surpassed.

The great contributions of all women and WUs at all levels over the past five years have been highly appreciated and noted by the Party and State, expressed by the honors bestowed upon collectives and individuals, including: 7 Heroes of Labor in the Reform Period, 7 Ho Chi Minh Medals, 412 Independence Medals of various classes, 2,101 Labor Medals of various classes; 29 People's Teachers, 695 Meritorious Teachers; 16 People's Doctors, 655 Meritorious Doctors; 12 People's Artists, and 104 Meritorious Artists. The Vietnam Women's Union was honored to receive the 2nd Gold Star Medal by the State.

Such achievements of the last term can be attributed to the great efforts of all women in all fields and their strong ties to and support for the WU. WUs at all levels have creatively realized the Party's orientations and resolutions and the Government's policies and laws in the implementation of the WU's tasks. The WU has had a strong connection to its members and to all women and been united and highly determined to implement innovative programs and methods. Officials at all WU levels have shown their enthusiasm, responsibility, and wholeheartedness in service to the women's movement and the WU's work. In particular, the VWU has always received great attention and guidance from the Party at all levels and favorable policies from the Government and authorities of all levels, and has benefited from the practical support and cooperation of governments at all levels, and from different sectors, enterprises, communities and international friends.

Apart from these achievements, there still remains a number of *weaknesses and shortcomings* in the women's movement and WU's work:

The women's movement has failed to develop evenly, failing to tap into the full potential and creativity of all women throughout society. The VWU's educational work about law and ethics is still somewhat shallow. Ideological work has not been sharpened, and information about the WU's work has been weak. There have been shortcomings and lack of proactiveness in formulating laws and policies concerning gender equality, developing social debate on and supervising the implementation of these laws and policies. WUs at all levels have not taken enough initiative in resolving cases of violence against women and violations against women's dignity. Activities to assist women in keeping stable jobs, in post-vocational training and poverty reduction have often been inefficient. Mobilization and support for women in building happy families has not yet met the requirements of the new situation and failed to achieve tangible results. Many chapters have difficulties in managing their membership. The strengthening of provincial/municipal WU apparatuses has occurred too slowly. Training, mid-career training and nominations of women officials to the Party and the government system have not been implemented strategically, leading to insufficient results and failing to meet the requirements set forth in Resolution No. 11 of the Politburo and legal provisions on gender equality. By the end of the term, 2 goals set forth in the Resolution of the 10th Congress had not been fulfilled, including the goal of mothers with children under the age of 16 receiving child rearing information/education, knowledge and guidance, and the goal that the WU's officials should meet specified standards in accordance with their positions.

There are a number of causes for the above-mentioned weaknesses and shortcomings. Foremost are the subjective causes. The programs and methods of the WU's operations have failed to effectively fulfill the requirements of women's work in the new context and to meet the increasingly diversified demands of all women. The WU has not been sufficiently prepared in terms of theoretical and practical experience and thus the effectiveness in the formulation of policies and laws on gender equality has suffered. There are some limitations on the capacity for strategic consultation of WU officials at the central and provincial/municipal levels and the implementation and organizational capacity of WU officials at district and grassroots levels. Some WU officials are

not fully aware of the principles, objectives and the central role of WUs in women's work, as well as of the requirements of women's work with the new administrative working style. Personnel working at each individual WU level lacks expertise in planning; training fails to meet the requirements of dealing with reality. Certain policies have not been subject to strong guidance, leading to a lack of concrete solutions to existing problems. Certain WUs at all levels are not active in mobilizing resources and rely solely on the state budget.

The *objective causes* are: the need to concretize women- and gender equality-related orientations, policies, and laws of the Party and State at both the central and local levels is occurring too slowly; inspection, supervision and accelerating the implementation of women-related orientations and policies have not been given adequate attention, and have thus not been effective. Certain Party and government levels have not given adequate attention to women's work or the work of the WU; focused direction has not been given to the implementation of the Party's orientation concerning women's work, and there has not been synchronous coordination between industries, branches, and mass organizations. Uneven levels of socio-economic development between and among regions, the adverse impact of the market economy and international economic integration, complicated development of social issues, crimes, and family violence, etc. have had a direct impact on the lives of some women, affecting women's mobilization and the efficiency of the women's movement. Financial funds for gender equality objectives and the operation of the WU are limited.

Based on this assessment of the women's movement and the VWU's operations, *the following lessons* can be drawn:

1. The issuance of appropriate orientation and policies facilitating women's progress and gender equality and mainstreaming gender in the Party and State's orientations and policies, together with firm guidance by Party Committees and governments at all levels along with effective coordination at all levels and branches in implementation, and the consensus and support of the entire society are all prerequisite conditions for the success of women's work and the cause of gender equality.

2. As the agent of change directly determining women's progress and gender equality, Vietnamese women must continuously develop their morality, enhance awareness, capacity and knowledge in all domains, bring into full play their inner strengths, cooperation and mutual love, and take the initiative in resolving issues faced by women as individuals and in their families.

3. Playing the key role in women's work, WUs at all levels must continuously innovate in developing the content and form of their work, taking the initiative in providing consultation and recommendations and promoting the implementation of laws and policies on gender equality. The WU staff is the key factor in building strong WUs; WU staff at all levels must be exemplary, continuously enhancing their knowledge and capacity, as well as being dynamic, creative and in touch with women at the grassroots level, maintaining a close relationship with WU members and all women.