

Gendered risks, poverty and vulnerability in Viet Nam:

A case study of the National Targeted Programme for Poverty Reduction

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List of acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CEDAW	UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEMA	Committee of Ethnic Minority Affairs
CAFAW	Committee for the Advancement of Women
COMMIT	Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking
CPFC	Commission for Population, Family and Children
CPGRS	Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy
CPRC	Chronic Poverty Research Centre
DFID	UK Department for International Development
DOLISA	Department of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs
DONRE	Department of Natural Resources and Environment
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSO	General Statistics Office
GTZ	German Development Cooperation
HCFP	Health Care Fund for the Poor
HEPR	Hunger Elimination and Poverty Reduction Programme
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFGS	Institute for Family and Gender Studies
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO	International Labour Organization
INGO	International NGO
IPEC	International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (ILO)
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOCST	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOLISA	Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs
MPI	Ministry of Planning and Investment
MPS	Ministry of Public Security
NCAFAW	National Commission for the Advancement of Women
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NTPPR	National Targeted Programme for Poverty Reduction
PM	Prime Minister
POA	Plan of Action
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SAC	Social Affairs Committee
SEDP	Socio-Economic Development Plans
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SPC	Supreme People's Court
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
UN	United Nations
UNCRC	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	UN Development Program

UNFPA	UN Population Fund
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNIFEM	UN Development Fund for Women
VASS	Vietnamese Academy of Social Scientists
VDHS	Vietnam Demographic and Health Survey
VHLSS	Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey
VWU	Viet Nam Women's Union
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive summary

The importance of social protection has become increasingly recognised in recent years, especially in the wake of the recent food price and global economic crises, but there has been little attention to the role that gender plays in the implementation and effectiveness of social protection programmes. It is often assumed that gender is already being addressed in social protection initiatives because cash or asset transfer programmes and public works schemes often target women, drawing on evidence that women are more likely to invest additional income in family well-being. The role that gender relations play in social protection effectiveness is, however, likely to be more complex. Gender norms and dynamics may affect the type of risk that is tackled, the choice of social protection modality implemented, awareness-raising approaches, public buy-in to social safety net programmes, and, most importantly, programme outcomes.

In Viet Nam over the past five years, there has also been growing policy momentum around social protection issues, motivated by a concern to reduce poverty and vulnerability emphasised in the country's first and second phase national development plans, the Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDP 1 2001-2005 and SEDP 2 2006-2010). Viet Nam now has an array of social protection programmes in place which include: *social assistance programmes*, such as the National Targeted Programme for Poverty Reduction (NTPPR), *social insurance schemes*, such as a health insurance programme which covers all children under the age of six as well as all households below the poverty line, *social welfare services*, including programmes targeted at child protection and domestic violence, and *social equity measures*, such as the 2007 Gender Equality Law and the 2007 Gender Violence Law. In 2009 a consultation process around the draft National Social Protection Strategy was also initiated.

The focus of this report is on the government's flagship umbrella poverty reduction programme, the NTPPR, which seeks to address a range of deprivations experienced by poor households and communities and to improve their productive capacities. Access to credit, basic services, agricultural extension services, land holding and legal aid, is coupled closely with human capital development programmes, such as school fee exemptions, vocational training, loans for tertiary education, investments in health and sanitation, and improvements in community infrastructure. In preparation for the new National Social Protection Strategy, which is currently under design and which aims to address the fragmented implementation approach of NTPPR, we examine the current programme through a gender lens, mindful that, as a growing body of international evidence suggests, tackling the gendered manifestations of risk and vulnerability are likely to have positive spill-over effects on general programme effectiveness. The purpose here therefore is to analyse the extent to which gender-specific economic and social risks, including food insecurity, inform NTPPR programme design and implementation, with the aim of informing ongoing initiatives to strengthen social protection effectiveness.

Methodology: This report is part of a three year Australian Development Research Award-funded project on gender, social protection and food security in South East Asia, and is also nested within a broader programme of work funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) on Gender and Social Protection Effectiveness, being undertaken in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The research involved complementary qualitative and quantitative work, including analysis of secondary data and programme documents, key informant interviews, a household questionnaire, focus group discussions and life histories. Primary research was conducted in four sites, two in the impoverished Northeast highlands of the country and two in the Mekong River Delta region of southern Viet Nam. Sites were selected drawing on a purposive matched sampling technique, which involved selecting two villages in each province of neither transient nor extreme poverty (approximately 'middling poor'), using the commune list of poor households based on the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) poverty line.

Gendered risks and vulnerabilities: The report's conceptual framework takes as its starting point that both economic risks (including the economic impact of environmental and natural risks) and

social risks are influenced by gender dynamics and may have important differential impacts on men and women, boys and girls. On the one hand, there has been considerable progress in terms gender equality in recent years in Viet Nam. The nation's women are more economically active than most others in the region and the gender pay gap is comparatively low. Furthermore, boys' and girls' school enrolment rates, as well as adult literacy rates, are comparable and maternal and child mortality has fallen dramatically. On the other hand, however, women and girls, especially among ethnic minority groups, are considerably disadvantaged in terms of the nature and quality of opportunities and resources available to them. For example, women are over-represented in economic sectors that are particularly vulnerable in times of economic downturn, including in the informal sector. Furthermore, they still lack equal rights to land and equal access to agricultural credit and technologies, meaning that they bear the brunt of the negative impacts of trade liberalisation and have seen few of the benefits. Finally, while Viet Nam's progress towards educational equity has been laudable, ethnic minority girls remain significantly disadvantaged compared to their brothers.

Social protection responses to gender vulnerabilities: While Viet Nam has a long tradition of state-led social welfare programmes that address poverty and vulnerability, they are often poorly funded, ad-hoc and offer little protection to households outside the formal economy. Furthermore, in recent decades Viet Nam has emphasized economic growth over human and social development goals. While the 2006-2010 Socio-Economic Development Plan was able to incorporate gender-specific indicators in areas such as agriculture, employment, environment, health and education, the NTPPR pays very little attention to the gendered nature of poverty and vulnerability. In fact, apart from the targeting of female-headed households and a general mention of the need for gender-sensitive programming, it contains no gender-specific targets or measurable outcomes. Moreover, the 2009 mid-term evaluation of the NTPPR was relatively weak in its attention to gender issues, but did recommend that going forward the NTPPR develop a more gender-sensitive approach in line with a multi-dimensional understanding of poverty and vulnerability as reflected in Viet Nam's Development Goals.

Effects on individuals, households and communities: Evidence suggests that despite a lack of gendered targets, the NTPPR is meeting some important practical gender needs. All focus group participants considered the health insurance card to be extremely valuable, enabling them to conserve scarce resources and, in the case of women, take less time off of work to tend ill children. It also enabled women to address their reproductive health needs. The school fee exemption policy was also key for respondents, who felt that more children were now going to school longer. However, the poorest focus group discussants still felt that there were barriers to education: costs such as clothing, transportation, and the loss of children's labour were hard for them to bear. Access to credit emerged as another key programme impact. The Viet Nam Women's Union stepped in as an intermediary for poor women; positive impacts of credit were seen not only in terms of economics, but also in some cases in terms of women's domestic decision-making and voice. In addition, NTPPR investments in roads and electricity have brought real benefits to communities, especially improving accessibility to health clinics and schools. However, impacts on reducing pockets of food insecurity and malnutrition, especially in highland communities, have been limited. Improvements in social risks, such as language barriers facing ethnic minority women and intra-household violence, have also been minimal.

Drivers of programme impacts: A number of politico-institutional and socio-cultural drivers have contributed to the mixed implementation record of the NTPPR, including its gender dimensions. The programme's recognition of poverty's complexity calls for a level of coordination between line ministries that has yet to be realized, increasing programme fragmentation and implementation overlap. A national focus on human capital development and reaching middle income status also means that attention to households and communities still vulnerability to food insecurity and hunger is largely absent, despite important pockets of nutritional deprivation. Furthermore, funding, particularly for monitoring and evaluation, is limited.

These institutional weaknesses appear to be exacerbated in the case of efforts to mainstream gender, and is reflected in a dearth of gender disaggregated data, lack of practical training on gender mainstreaming; inadequate or insufficient accountability mechanisms (especially binding executive decrees); and under-recognition of the potential for gender equality to contribute to the realisation of developmental and poverty reduction goals. Language and cultural barriers also prevent women from being adequately served by programme provisions and result in their effective exclusion from community discussions. Finally, while the National Assembly's Social Affairs Committee and donors are increasingly calling for gender considerations to be included in programme development, a relatively weak civil society has rendered civic oversight challenging.

Conclusions and policy implications: Overall, the report concludes that the NTPPR has made a useful contribution towards addressing a number of women's practical gender needs, especially in terms of reducing the costs associated with accessing basic health and education services for their families and themselves. It has also contributed to infrastructure development, improvements in women's access to credit and community participation, and in some communities to food security. Despite this, however, there remains scope for improvement in both programme design and implementation.

- Programme benefits should be informed by an evidence-based understanding of the differential needs of men and women, boys and girls, in both male- and female-headed households, as well as the ways in which gender differences in economic and social risks intersect with ethnicity in ethnic minority communities. An important first step in this direction would be to complement the recent mid-term evaluation of the NTPPR with a national-level assessment of the gendered impacts of the programme to date.
- Social protection policies and programmes should ensure that food security and agricultural productivity remain core objectives of poverty reduction approaches so as to effectively eradicate pockets of vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition.
- Gender-disaggregated data should be used in poverty reduction and social protection programme reporting, and a budget commitment to support this process should be made.
- It will also be important to identify a lead agency to take responsibility for ensuring that gender is adequately integrated across all programme components and the potential for synergies maximised.

1. Introduction

Despite the heightened visibility of social protection in recent years, especially in the wake of the recent food price crisis and global economic crisis, there has been little attention to the role that gender plays in the implementation and effectiveness of social protection programmes. It is often assumed that gender is already being addressed in social protection initiatives because many transfer programmes and public works programmes target women. This focus stems largely from evidence that women are more likely to invest additional income in family well-being as well as from a concern to promote greater representation of women in employment programmes. However, the role that gender relations play in social protection effectiveness is likely to be much more complex, affecting not only the type of risk that is tackled but also the programme impacts, as a result of pre-existing intra-household and community gender dynamics. Moreover, gender norms and roles may shape choice of social protection modality, awareness-raising approaches and public buy-in to social safety net programmes. As Goetz (1995) argues: ‘understanding the gendered features of institutional norms, structures and practices is an important key to ensuring that women and men benefit equally from macro level policy changes’.

In Viet Nam over the past five years, there has also been growing policy momentum around social protection issues, motivated by a concern to reduce poverty and vulnerability emphasised in the country’s first and second phase national development plans, the Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDP 1 2001-2005 and SEDP 2 2006-2010). In 2009, there was a consultation process around the draft National Social Protection Strategy, and policy dialogue and programmatic action have intensified in the wake of the fallout of the global food price, fuel and financial crises of 2008-2009. Key social protection programmes in place now include:

- *Social assistance* programmes, notably the National Targeted Programme for Poverty Reduction (NTPPR), focused on human capital development, credit provision and capacity building), Programme 135, an initiative aimed at improving infrastructure in impoverished ethnic minority communities, and pensions for the elderly;
- *Social insurance* schemes, in particular a health insurance programme for households below the poverty line and all children under six years and a range of commercial and non-profit micro-insurance schemes;
- *Social welfare services*, including programmes to prevent and respond to gender-based violence and child protection deprivations; and
- *Social equity measures*, including a series of new laws to tackle issues of discrimination and violence, especially the 2007 Gender Equality Law and the 2007 Gender Violence Law.

The focus of this report is on the government’s flagship umbrella poverty reduction programme, the NTPPR, which has recently been reviewed and is currently being revisited for further development post-2010. We approach the analysis through a gender lens, mindful that, as a growing body of international evidence suggests, tackling the gendered manifestations of risk and vulnerability has positive spill-over effects on general programme effectiveness. A recent review of 271 World Bank projects by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), for instance, found that, when projects address the needs of both men and women, the sustainability of outcomes increases by 16% (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2009). The purpose here therefore is to analyse the extent to which gender-specific economic and social risks, including food insecurity, inform NTPPR programme design and implementation, with the aim of informing ongoing initiatives to strengthen effectiveness.

1.1 Methodology

The research methodology involved a mixed methods approach of qualitative and quantitative work. It is structured around the following four areas (see Table 1):

1. Understanding the diversity of gendered economic and social risks;
2. Gender analysis of social protection policy and design;
3. Effects of the social protection programme on gender equality, food security and poverty/vulnerability reduction at community, household and intra-household levels;
4. Implications for future policy and programme design to improve social protection effectiveness.

Table 1: Overview of research methodology

Type of analysis	Details
Desk review	Secondary data and programme document analysis
Key informant interviews	National (policymakers, donors, international agencies, civil society, researchers) and sub-national (government and non-government implementers)
Household questionnaire	Total of 100 households
Focus group discussions	12 FGDs, 8 with beneficiaries (4 male and 4 female groups), 4 with non-beneficiaries (female groups)
Life histories	16 life histories (8 men and 8 women) at different life/social stages: adolescence; married; single household heads (divorced, abandoned or widowed); elderly

Research was conducted in four sites, two in Ha Giang province in the impoverished Northeast highlands of the country and two in An Giang province in the Mekong River Delta region of southern Viet Nam. Table 2 provides further details at provincial and commune level. Sites were selected drawing on a purposive matched sampling technique, which involved selecting two villages in each province of neither transient nor extreme poverty (approximately 'middling poor'), using the commune list of poor households based on the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) poverty line.

Table 2: Key characteristics of research sites at province and commune levels

	Lao Va Chai commune, Yen Minh district, Ha Giang province	Co To commune, Tri Ton district, An Giang province
Population and land		
Province location	Northeast highlands	Mekong River Delta
Province main ethnic minority groups	Kinh, Hmong, Tay, Dao, others 90% ethnic minority groups	Kinh, Khmer, Cham, Hoa
Province population	660,000	2 million
Poverty ranking	50-60% poverty rate (2006)	0-10% poverty rate (2006)
Commune population	4877 (June 2009), female: 51.5%, male: 48.5%	11,366 (January 2009), female: 52%, male: 48%
No. of households	827 (June 2009)	2905 (November 2009)
No. of villages	16	6
Ethnicity	Hmong, Dao, Nung, Chinese, Kinh	Khmer, Kinh
Religion	None	Buddhist
Poverty rate	34.1% (2009); 45.3% (2008)	13.3% (2009); 16% (2008)
Poor female household heads	5% (as in the list of poor household)	27% (most are widows aged 65 and above)
Land and economic activities		
Natural land area	1058 ha of agricultural land (rice, maize, beans)	4231 ha, of which 3444 ha are agricultural land (rice) and 1465 ha are for other crops
Agricultural activities	Rice, maize, bean and vegetable growing	Rice and vegetable growing
Livestock	Buffalos, cows, pigs, horses, goats, poultry	Pigs, cows, poultry

Non-agricultural activities	Small-scale trading and labouring, mainly in road making or construction	Small-scale trading and labouring, mainly in mining (2 stone mines and 1 gold mine are located in the area)
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The main objectives of the desk review were to map key gender-specific vulnerabilities in the country; to identify how gender is (or is not) already discussed and integrated within the context of social protection policies and programmes at a country level; to carry out a gender audit/mapping of the main social protection programmes (including those tackling food insecurity) and the extent to which they integrate gender considerations; and to contextualise the NTPPR within the country's broader national social protection framework and related policy debates.

Using semi-structured questionnaires, key informant interviews were carried out in October 2009 to provide a broader understanding of social protection design decision-making processes and to explore the political economy dimensions of the integration of gender into social protection policies and programmes. At the sub-national level, key informant interviews with implementing agencies aimed to provide a better understanding of the key challenges of implementing social protection at the local level and the implications/impacts of implementation challenges on households and individuals.

The household survey asked NTPPR programme beneficiaries to identify two main quantifiable trends: i) the dominant vulnerabilities and risks among households below the poverty line and the extent to which these risks are gendered and generational; and ii) to provide an understanding of both household and individual coping strategies in the face of the above risks, including both informal and formal social protection mechanisms. FGDs were then used to tease out the details of the social protection impacts, both direct and indirect, at individual, household and community levels.

Finally, the use of life histories (with beneficiaries representing different life/social stages from adolescence to old age) allowed for a more in-depth exploration of individuals' gendered experiences of risk and vulnerability, and the individual-, household-, community- and policy-level factors that shape available coping/resilience strategies. They also provide insights into the relative importance of the NTPPR in diverse individuals' lives.

1.2 Report overview

The report is structured as follows. Section 2 discusses the conceptual framework that underpins the analysis, highlighting the importance of understanding gendered economic and social risks at individual, household and community levels, and reviews the extent to which gender considerations have been integrated into targeted social services programmes in developing country contexts. Section 3 maps out the patterning of gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities in the Vietnamese context, while Section 4 discusses the extent to which these are reflected in social protection policy and programming. Section 5 then turns to an analysis of our fieldwork findings on the effects of the NTPPR on gender dynamics at individual, household and community levels. Section 6 explores political economy opportunities and constraints for strengthening attention to gender-sensitive programme implementation. Section 7 concludes and highlights key policy implications of our findings.

2. Conceptual framework: Gendered economic and social risks and social protection responses²

Social protection, commonly defined as encompassing a subset of interventions for the poor – carried out formally by the state (often with donor or international non-governmental organisation (INGO) financing and support) or the private sector, or informally through community or inter- and intra- household support networks – is an increasingly important approach to reduce vulnerability and chronic poverty, especially in contexts of crisis (see Box 1). To date, however, there has been a greater focus on economic risks and vulnerability – such as income and consumption shocks and stresses – and only limited attention to social risks. Social risks – such as gender inequality, social discrimination, unequal distributions of resources and power at the intra-household level and limited citizenship – are often just as important, if not more important, in pushing and keeping households in poverty. Indeed, of the five poverty traps identified by the 2008-9 Chronic Poverty Report, four were non-income measures: insecurity (ranging from insecure environments to conflict and violence), limited citizenship (lack of a meaning political voice), spatial disadvantage (exclusion from politics, markets, resources, etc, as a consequence of geographical remoteness) and social discrimination (which traps people in exploitative relationships of power and patronage) (CPRC, 2008).

Box 1: Conceptualising social protection

Drawing on Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler's (2004) framework of social protection, the objectives of the full range of social protection interventions are fourfold:

- *Protective*: Providing relief from deprivation (e.g. disability benefits or non-contributory pensions);
- *Preventive*: Averting deprivation (e.g. through savings clubs, insurance or risk diversification);
- *Promotive*: Enhancing real incomes and capabilities (e.g. through inputs transfers); and
- *Transformative*: Addressing concerns of social equity and exclusion by expanding social protection to arenas such as equity, empowerment and economic, social and cultural rights, rather than confining the scope of social protection to respond to economic risks alone through targeted income and consumption transfers.

Social protection refers to a set of instruments (formal and informal) that provide:

- Social assistance (e.g. regular and predictable cash or in-kind transfers, including fee waivers, public works schemes, food aid);
- Social services targeted to marginalised groups (e.g. family counselling, juvenile justice services, family violence prevention and protection);
- Social insurance to protect people against risks of shocks (typically health, employment and environmental);
- Social equity measures (e.g. rights awareness campaigns, skills training) to protect against social risks such as discrimination and abuse.

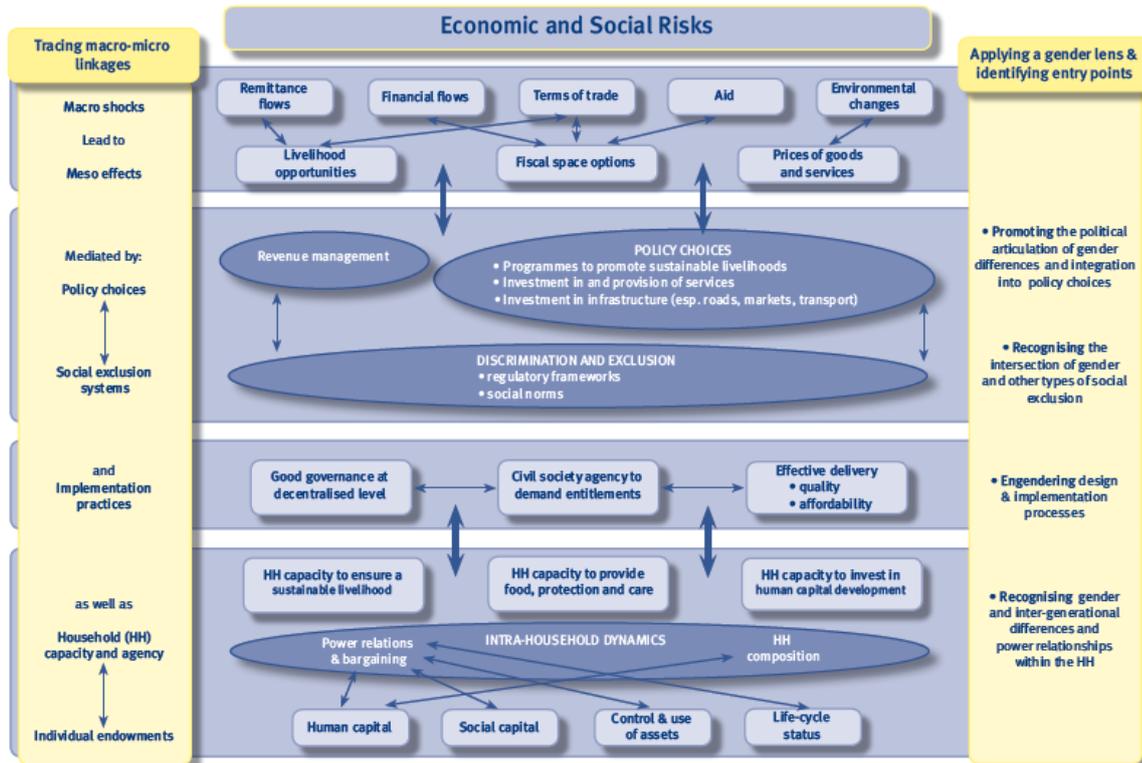
2.1 The gender dimensions of economic and social risks

Poor households typically face a range of risks, ranging from the economic to the social. Vulnerability to risk, and its opposite, resilience, are both strongly linked to the capacity of individuals or households to prevent, mitigate or cope with such risks. Both economic risks (including the economic impact of environmental and natural risks) and social risks are influenced by gender dynamics and may have important differential impacts on men and women. Because they are socially constructed, gender roles and responsibilities are highly varied, and infused with power relations (WHO, 2007). Figure 1 below maps the ways in which economic and social risks

² This section is based on Holmes and Jones (2009a).

can be reinforced or mediated from the macro to the micro level through, for example, policy interventions, discriminatory practices embedded in institutions (e.g. social exclusion and discrimination in the labour market) and community, household and individual capacities and agency. Opportunities to enhance the integration of gender at each of these levels are highly context specific and depend on the balance between formal and informal social protection mechanisms within a country as well as the profile of the government agencies responsible for the design and implementation of formal mechanisms.

Figure 1: Impact pathways of vulnerability to economic and social risks



Source: Holmes and Jones (2009a).

2.1.1 Gendered economic risks

Economic risks can include declines in national financial resources and/or aid flows, terms of trade shocks or environmental disasters. Stresses might include long-term national budget deficits and debt, lack of a regulatory framework and/or enforcement of health and safety standards at work and lack of an economically enabling environment. Given men's and women's differential engagement in the economy, such as the labour market, the impacts of macroeconomic shocks are highly gendered. For example, in times of economic crisis, women are often the first to lose jobs in the formal sector, such as in Korea during the financial crisis of 1997/98 (World Bank, 2009a). In other parts of East Asia, including Indonesia and the Philippines, however, women gained in overall employment as a result of their lower wages and lower levels of union organisation (ibid). Cuts in public expenditure are also likely to affect women more in many contexts because they typically have greater responsibility for household health and education access (Quisumbing et al., 2008). The effects on men and male identities of economic malaise are also increasingly recognised. Silberschmidt (2001), for instance, highlights the way in which rising unemployment and low incomes are undermining male breadwinner roles and resulting in negative coping strategies, such as sexually aggressive behaviour and gender-based violence, in a bid to reassert traditional masculine identities.

At the meso or community level, the impacts of economic shocks are mediated by, for example, gender-segmented labour markets and institutional rules and norms (e.g. absence of affirmative

action to address historical discrimination of women and marginalised social groups), which lead to poor access and utilisation of productive services by women. Women in general have less access to credit, inputs (such as fertiliser), extension services and, therefore, improved technologies (World Bank, 2009a), which undermines their resilience to cope with stress and shocks.

How poor households are able to cope with and mitigate the impacts of shocks and ongoing stresses also depends on a number of factors at the micro or intra-household level. Household members' vulnerability is shaped by household composition (e.g. dependency ratios, sex of the household head, number of boys and girls in the household), individual and household ownership and control of assets (land, labour, financial capital, livestock, time and so on), access to labour markets, social networks and social capital and levels of education. Women typically have lower levels of education, less access, ownership and control of productive assets and different social networks to men, leading to lower economic productivity and income generation and weaker bargaining positions in the household. In times of crisis, moreover, underlying gender biases may mean that women's or female-headed households' assets are more vulnerable to stripping than those of men, the impact of which may be lengthy if what has been sold cannot be replaced. Women's bargaining position and entitlements may also be reduced more rapidly than those of male members of households (Byrne and Baden, 1995).

2.1.2 Gendered social risks

Social sources of vulnerability are often as or more important barriers to sustainable livelihoods and general well-being than economic shocks and stresses (CPRC, 2008). At a macro level, social exclusion and discrimination often inform and/or are perpetuated by formal policies, legislation and institutions (e.g. low representation of women or minority groups in senior positions). In many countries, however, efforts to ensure that national laws and policies are consistent in terms of providing equal treatment and/or opportunities to citizens irrespective of gender, caste, race, ethnicity, religion, class, sexuality and disability are often weak or uneven, and hampered by a lack of resources to enforce such legislation, especially at the sub-national level.

At the meso or community level, absence of voice in community dialogues is a key source of vulnerability. For instance, women are often excluded from decision-making roles in community-level committees, and this gender-based exclusion may be further exacerbated by caste, class or religion. Some excluded groups are reluctant to access programmes or claim rights and entitlements, fearing violence or abuse from dominant community members. Another critical and related variable is social capital. Poverty may be compounded by a lack of access to social networks that provide access to employment opportunities but also support in times of crisis. It can also reinforce marginalisation from policy decision-making processes.

At the micro or intra-household level, social risk is related to limited intra-household decision-making and bargaining power based on age and/or gender, and time poverty as a result of unpaid productive work responsibilities and/or familial care work. All of these can reduce time and resources available for wider livelihood or coping strategies, and may contribute to women tolerating discriminatory and insecure employment conditions and/or abusive domestic relationships. Life-course status may also exacerbate intra-household social vulnerabilities. Girls are often relatively voiceless within the family, and a source of unpaid domestic/care-work labour. The elderly (especially widows) also tend to face particular marginalisation as they come to be seen as non-productive and in some contexts even a threat to scarce resources.

2.2 Applying a gender lens to targeted social service programmes

Targeted social services – a subset of social protection programmes involving subsidised access to social services such as education and vocational training, health, housing, agricultural extension, food security and microfinance for the poor – have a number of benefits, both technical

and political. Key advantages include their pro-poor orientation and their focus on preventing the intergenerational transmission of poverty by facilitating poor households to access the critical basic services necessary for human capital development. On the political front, targeted social services fit well in political cultures that have a strong emphasis on equity and endorsement of the state's role as guarantor of access to a minimum standard of living for all irrespective of wealth. This entitlement approach to basic services for all is often strongly supported by non-governmental actors and some international agencies (DFID et al., 2009). However, in other contexts, the non-conditional nature of fee exemptions and the costs involved in public service provision mean that such initiatives may meet with considerable resistance (e.g. Behrman, 2007).

From a gender perspective, targeted social services generally do not have a direct gender focus but nevertheless may often have important gendered spill-over effects. As primary caregivers, women are responsible in many contexts for ensuring that their families avail themselves of basic services, especially education, nutrition and health. Fee exemptions for such services thus free up scarce resources for investment in other basic needs and complementary inputs such as school uniforms and books, school meals, transport to health clinics and better quality food. Moreover, in societies where children are valued as a potential labour source and education is not viewed as a basic right for all, financial assistance with schooling may help to overcome reluctance or an inability to invest in children's education. This is especially the case with girls, who are often the first to forgo schooling on account of household labour demands (Jones and Sumner, 2009). Others argue that providing poor caregivers with financial assistance for their children ensures some social recognition of the key role women play in social reproduction (Adato and Mindek, 2000).

In the case of agricultural extension services, however, evidence suggests that women tend to be excluded for a number of reasons. The majority of extension agents are male (even though numbers are gradually improving in some contexts (Birner et al., 2009)). This means that they are more likely to assume a male farmer norm, that home visits in societies where there is strict gender separation may be difficult and that meeting places and times may not take into account women's domestic and care work responsibilities or mobility restrictions (Ogawa, 2004).

Finally, microfinance services have often been targeted at women, aiming to transform gender asymmetries within the household and market (Kabeer, 2008). While services focusing on financial access have had only a minimal impact on intra-household and market dynamics, many services are designed more holistically and have had greater effects on structures of inequality. Evaluations show that, by investing in women's associations that meet regularly, a range of synergies can be achieved, including accumulation of social capital, improved health, nutritional and educational outcomes for children, legal literacy and greater intra-household decision making as a result of personal empowerment (ibid). At the community level, such groups, where they are linked to awareness-raising initiatives, may also serve as a basis for wider political participation (Jones et al., 2007).

There are, however, important limitations. Targeted social services focus on the demand side, but do not necessarily tackle service supply. So while fee exemptions or stipends may provide greater access for the poor and vulnerable, they do not ensure service proximity (which, given transport costs, is often a major barrier to service access) or quality and appropriateness of services for vulnerable populations (e.g. tailored to the needs of ethnic minority or marginalised caste groups) (Batliwala and Dhanraj, 2004). Moreover, while some targeted social service programmes are linked to user group initiatives that encourage user involvement in service governance (e.g. mothers' committees that oversee early childhood nutritional and health services in India) (Jones et al., 2007), others are passive by design and do not encourage active community participation.

Financial services have additional limitations. Just as the practice of group liability for loans can create solidarity, it also can result in divisions and conflict among women when some members struggle to repay loans. Loans can also become a source of intra-household tension and

undermine any empowerment gains, especially if women have to turn to their husbands for help to repay the loan (Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1996). At the community level, defaulting may result in social exclusion and embarrassment and a loss of self-esteem (Kabeer, 2008). Microfinance services have also made only limited inroads into sustained poverty reduction, in large part because of the difficulties in overcoming the gender-segmented nature of livelihood opportunities. Kabeer (2008) argues that: 'Most programmes fail to tackle the gender constraints that confine women entrepreneurs to narrower and less profitable forms of trade and business' and that only when programmes combine skill development and livelihood support are these barriers broken down.

In the next section, we draw on the above conceptual framework in order to assess the extent to which the NTPPR is contributing to greater opportunities for women and simultaneously addressing unequal intra-household and community gender dynamics.

3. Gendered risks, poverty and vulnerability in Viet Nam

3.1 Economic risks and vulnerabilities

Viet Nam has witnessed impressive growth and reductions in poverty over recent decades, with gross domestic product (GDP) growing at more than 7% per annum since the late 1990s (Gao et al., 2008). Viet Nam also managed to exceed several Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets early on, including more than halving poverty, from 58% in 1993 to 19.5% in 2004 and 16% in 2006 (Gao et al., 2008; GSO, 2006, cited in Giang, 2008). Behind these changes are several decades of market-oriented reforms known as the *Doi Moi* ('open door' or 'renovation') reforms, which shifted Viet Nam from a centrally planned economy to an increasingly market-oriented one, ultimately resulting in Viet Nam's acceptance into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2006.

However, although from an economic perspective the *Doi Moi* reforms were considered a huge success, their social impacts are subject to more debate (Fritzen, 2003). Alongside improved standards of living for many Vietnamese, recent decades have seen significant structural transformation within the domestic economy that has meant rising inequalities and more intense poverty for some segments of the population (Giang, 2008). This has been reflected in a rise in the Gini coefficient between 1993 and 2004 (from 0.34 to 0.37) (ADB, 2005). Moreover, a closer look reveals persistent inequalities across certain regions and ethnic groups. The Northwest, the Central Highlands and the North Central Coast are considerably poorer than the rest of the country, although the gap between richer and poorer regions is gradually narrowing.³ A marked rural–urban divide persists as well: most of the poor live in rural areas and an estimated 20.4% of the rural population is classified as poor, versus only 3.9% in urban areas (Joint Donor Group, 2007).⁴ Structural transformation and the relative shift in recent years away from agriculture and towards manufacturing⁵ have brought with them increasing internal migration flows from rural to urban areas (Resurreccion and Ha, 2007), and a dynamic that is highly gendered (see Box 2).

Box 2: Vulnerabilities of labour migrants in Viet Nam

Labour migration is an increasingly important source of livelihoods for poor Vietnamese households. By the late 1990s, internal labour migrants accounted for just under 10% of Hanoi's population, although these figures likely underestimate the number of temporary migrants (Hardy, 2003, cited in Resurreccion and Ha, 2007). Labour migrants to urban areas are generally underpaid and face harsh working conditions, with women migrants tending to be worse off than men. A 2004–2005 study revealed that labour migrants earned significantly less than city residents, and that women were much more likely than men to be in the lowest paying group (Joint Donor Group, 2007). In fact, migrant women face a number of difficulties: they often live in uncomfortable and inadequate quarters;⁶ they are at risk of sexual harassment at, and en route to and from, work; they have low levels of social capital as a result of time poverty and being far from home; they are at greater risk of exploitation, including being trafficked; and they are often discriminated against in the local community (Nguyen et al., 2009). In general, rural migrants in Viet Nam are less able to access state assistance (e.g. housing, health care, education, social assistance) because of institutional requirements for household registration (Cook, 2009; Gao et al., 2009). For example, because they are less likely to be covered under the government health insurance card fee waivers intended for the poor,⁷ health risks are compounded by heavier out-of-pocket burdens in meeting health care needs (Joint Donor Group, 2007).

³ This narrowing is a result of faster poverty reduction rates in poorer regions and a general slowdown in poverty reduction in richer regions. The Northwest and Central Highlands have reduced poverty at the impressive rates of 19% and 23%, respectively, over the past four years, whereas richer regions like the Red River Delta and the Southeast have seen much slower improvements (Joint Donor Group 2007).

⁴ This rural–urban gap is closing somewhat as a result of continued reductions in rural areas coupled with stagnating, and by some measures increasing, poverty levels in urban areas (Joint Donor Group, 2007). These data were unofficial estimates for 2006 based on General Statistics Office (GSO) data.

⁵ Agriculture represented 71% of the Vietnamese economy in 1995 and declined to 57% of GDP in 2005.

⁶ Migrant women commonly share hostel accommodation, with up to 30 people with one shared bathroom. They also face high levels of theft and an insecure physical environment (Nguyen et al., 2009).

⁷ In 2002, the government created Health Care Funds for the Poor (HCFPs) to cover the costs of purchasing health insurance cards.

Interest in overseas migration is increasing, but a combination of weak regulations and weak support systems in destination countries is placing women migrants in particular in vulnerable situations. Informal sector women overseas face greater risks of harassment and isolation, and women working in the formal sector abroad are more likely to experience poor working conditions. Because they are unable to pay fees to labour-exporting companies, poor women are especially vulnerable to being trafficked (World Bank et al., 2006).

The decision to migrate and the implications of migration for inter-household dynamics are also highly gendered. It is increasingly common for women to migrate to cities in search of economic opportunity, but women's decision to migrate is complicated by gendered perceptions about household responsibilities (Lan, 2009). Despite the potential of female migration away from the home to fundamentally alter traditional gendered roles in the household, in a study of female migrants and their left-behind husbands from the Red River Delta, Resurreccion and Ha (2007) found traditional roles and attitudes to be surprisingly resilient. Although men take on household care work in women's absence, women 'manage' migration – by ensuring domestic assistance with chores, frequent visits, etc – in ways that preserve the traditional expectations and norms of gendered divisions of labour. Both women and men actively seek to preserve these norms in anticipation of a future when life returns to normal (ibid).

Geographic disparities aside, poverty is also strongly patterned along distinct ethnic lines. Ethnic minorities stand out as particularly disadvantaged in Viet Nam's economic context. They tend to be less educated, more likely to suffer from malnutrition, are almost twice as likely to work self-employed in agriculture and are half as likely to be wage earners (World Bank, 2006, cited in World Bank et al., 2006).⁸ They also tend to have fewer assets such as land, capital and credit, often live in remote regions and are generally less mobile than their Kinh/Chinese counterparts (World Bank, 2009b). Not surprisingly, ethnic minorities are disproportionately represented among the poor and food insecure. Although they account for only 15% of the national population, some 55% of ethnic minority households are in the poorest quintile, compared with just 12% of Kinh/Chinese. These groups are also more likely than ethnic majorities (93% versus 71%) to live in rural areas (ibid) and are heavily concentrated (75%) in the Northern Mountains and Central Highlands (ibid).⁹ They account for 44% of the poor and almost 60% of the hungry, implying that, in addition to a greater likelihood of living in poverty, these groups experience greater *intensity* of deprivation. An estimated 29% of ethnic minorities (versus 9% of rural households more generally) are food poor,¹⁰ and hence can be expected to experience hunger at certain points during the year (Joint Donor Group, 2007).¹¹

8 Specifically, 19% of ethnic minority heads of household have no schooling, compared with only 5% of Kinh/Chinese majorities; 79% of ethnic minorities are self-employed in agriculture, versus 43% of Kinh/Chinese; and 15% of ethnic minorities, compared with 31% of ethnic Kinh/Chinese, are in wage employment (World Bank, 2006, cited in World Bank et al., 2006).

9 However, half of Viet Nam's provinces have ethnic minority populations (World Bank, 2009b).

10 Food poverty is defined as a situation in which, even if a household were to allocate 100% of its expenditure to food, it still would not attain the minimum of 2100 calories per person per day (Joint Donor Group, 2007).

11 Ethnic minorities are a heterogeneous group, however. Viet Nam has some 54 ethnic groups, encompassing seven major language families. The largest group is the Tay, with approximately 1.5 million members; the smallest group is the O Du, with a mere 300 members (World Bank, 2009b). Groups living in the lowlands (Khmer and Cham) as well as those engaged in rice farming in the valleys of the Northern Highlands (Tay, Thai, Muong and Nung) have experienced important reductions in poverty, while their ethnic minority counterparts in the Northern Mountains, the Central Highlands and the South and Central Coasts remain extremely poor, with an estimated 70% living in poverty (Joint Donor Group, 2007). As a further indication that geographical variables cannot account for the complexities of poverty in Viet Nam, stagnant poverty levels among ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands contrast sharply with overall poverty trends in the region, which saw poverty fall by 23% in just four years. Rapidly declining poverty among ethnic Kinh and Chinese masks a lack of improvement in living standards of ethnic minorities in the region.

Box 3: Tackling food insecurity and nutritional disparities in Viet Nam

Viet Nam has made impressive inroads into improving food security over the last twenty years but important disparities still exist. In many households, poor micronutrient food items have been replaced or supplemented by rich ones (fruit, vegetables, fish and meat), but poor households continue to face nutritional deficits. In 2009 the Ministry of Health reported that 18.9% of children under the age of 5 were underweight – down from 38.7% less than 10 years ago. The rate of stunting is also declining; the current rate of 32.6% represents a 10% point drop since 2000. However, this laudable progress hides marked regional differences, the costs of which are particularly borne by ethnic minorities. The Central Highlands region reports malnutrition rates of nearly 30%, compared to only 16% in the southeastern region. Similarly, children in urban areas are half as likely to be underweight or stunted as area children in rural areas. Indeed, from 1990-2004, the rate of underweight children in urban areas declined nearly 50%; the rate of decline in mountainous areas, however, was only 25%.

Some analysts argue that part of the problem is that the government's current rapid growth and agricultural commercialisation strategy is unable to meet the needs of marginalised groups (primarily ethnic minorities) in remote highland areas. "Inducing pro-poor growth in these areas that are still largely characterised by subsistence agriculture may depend critically on tackling the cause of low food productivity [but this perspective] is not fully appreciated in policy circles" (Pandey et al., 2006: 2). The poor remain constrained by inadequate market institutions, lack of infrastructure and appropriate technology, and weak communal safety nets, all of which limit farmers' cropping choices and income growth potential. Moreover, most recently the global food price crisis has threatened to stymie or reverse earlier progress as household purchasing power declines. Women and children are particularly at risk given their already precarious nutrition status.

As argued in this report, it is therefore important that due attention is paid to food security in any forthcoming social protection strategy. While focusing on human capital development and improved access to services makes sense for Viet Nam's stage of development (soon-to-be middle-income country status), it is critical that food security and nutritional disparities are given the policy and programming priority they demand in poverty reduction efforts among the most vulnerable populations.

Sources: ARD, Inc., 2008; Molini, 2006; Pandey et al., 2006; UN-Viet Nam, 2008.

Both within and beyond these more vulnerable regions and groups, how people experience economic risks and vulnerabilities in Viet Nam is further differentiated according to gender and age. On the one hand, Viet Nam outperforms many of its neighbours with regard to the level of women's economic activity, with one of the highest percentages in the region (at over 80%), as well as one of the lowest gender gaps in terms of pay. According to a 2006 UN Development Program (UNDP) report, women's earnings were approximately 71% of men's in Viet Nam; although this is still a significant gap, it compares favourably with 44% in Japan and 36% in Malaysia, for instance (UNDP, 2006, cited in World Bank et al., 2006). On the other hand, however, women and girls, especially ethnic minorities, are considerably disadvantaged in terms of the nature and quality of economic opportunities available to them; access to and utilization of productive resources; levels of skills and education; and decision-making power, both within and outside the household.

In particular, both the nature and the intensity of poverty are gendered at the household level. While female-headed households overall have a lower incidence of poverty than male-headed ones (Lee 2008),¹² there is evidence that certain types of female-headed households (divorced, separated or widowed women, mainly in rural areas) are more vulnerable than male-headed households (ADB, 2005). Women's relatively fewer assets and lower access to credit and labour resources, however, mean that female-headed households are actually more vulnerable to shocks (FAO/UNDP, 2002, cited in ADB, 2005). Moreover, female-headed households are more likely to be extremely poor than their male counterparts (Joint Donor Group, 2007, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b). Within the household, the unequal allocation of food means that women and children¹³ have a lower nutritional status than men, especially in poor or near poor households

¹² 12% of female-headed households are poor, compared with 17% of male-headed households (Lee, 2008).

¹³ Children are more likely than adults to be poor; indeed, 24% of children aged 0-14 are classified as poor (compared with 16% nationally), and up to 36% among some ethnic groups (www.unicef.org/vietnam/children.html). However, there is no apparent gender difference (Lee, 2008).

(ADB, 2005). This can be traced to cultural practices such as men eating first, as well as women's relatively heavier productive and domestic workloads (Holmes and Jones, 2009b).

That women's economic vulnerabilities are magnified relative to men's can be traced to strongly segmented labour markets and women's lower access to credit and higher insecurity of land tenure. Women are underrepresented in salaried or wage employment compared with men (27% of women versus 42% of men) (Lee, 2008),¹⁴ and women and men work in very different sectors of the economy. Women play a major role in agricultural production: two-thirds of women in rural areas, compared with one-half of men, work in agriculture (World Bank, 2006, cited in World Bank et al., 2006). Moreover, it appears that the sector will become increasingly dependent on women's labour in the future. As of 2005, approximately 12 million women were farmers, and almost all new entrants into the sector were women (Center for Informatics, 2005 and ADB, 2005, cited in World Bank et al., 2006). Despite their more prominent role in agriculture, women have less access to extension services or technical training than men. Among these women, ethnic minority women are even more concentrated in agricultural self-employment (87% of ethnic minority women in rural areas), and hence are the least represented in wage employment or non-agricultural self-employment (World Bank et al., 2006).

Beyond agriculture, which accounts for roughly half of Vietnamese women, women are concentrated in a few industries, including retail sales, textiles/garment manufacturing and education/health/cultural services. Men, on the other hand, are distributed more widely across industries, although transportation/communications and construction/utilities predominate (Lee, 2008). Women also tend to be overrepresented in low-skilled sectors of the economy, particularly in the informal sector (Kabeer et al., 2006, cited in World Bank et al., 2006).¹⁵ Although neither the Statistical Yearbook nor the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS) tracks informal employment, women likely represent a large proportion of informal workers, working as seamstresses, street vendors (especially fruits and vegetables), domestic helpers and sex workers (ADB, 2005). Informal sector workers are considerably more vulnerable, since they lack the organisation or protection, in terms of both social benefits and labour market regulations, afforded to formal sector employees. Moreover, given their dominant position in low-skilled, labour-intensive export industries, women in Viet Nam, as in many areas throughout the Asia-Pacific region, are more likely to bear the brunt of economic downturns, as evidenced by the impact of the current global economic crisis (Jones and Holmes, 2009). In fact, merchandise export sectors have seen a 31.5% decline in the past year (Nguanbanchong, 2009, cited in Jones and Holmes, 2009).

Women's limited access to and control over productive resources constrain their economic opportunities and represent a significant source of vulnerability. Even after the passage of the Land Law in 2003, which granted Vietnamese women equal rights to their husbands' to be listed on land certificates, women are still underrepresented in land ownership, holding just 19% of Land Tenure Certificates, with men holding 66% (World Bank, 2008, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b). Women's access to credit is constrained in large part by their relatively more insecure land rights, and women are consequently less protected from life-cycle vulnerabilities, particularly in situations of widowhood, divorce or old age. Especially for rural women, limited access to credit, education and vocational training perpetuates a cycle of low-paying, unskilled jobs, with poor working conditions and limited livelihood options (Nguyen et al., 2009). With Viet Nam's opening of markets and eventual accession to the WTO, rural women engaged in agriculture have been exceptionally vulnerable to the negative impacts of trade liberalisation and the rural urbanisation and industrialisation that accompanied it. By many accounts, Viet Nam's land reform, which decollectivised agriculture and offered long-term leases to peasants, was central to its economic growth, but this transformative process left many without land. From 2001 to 2007, 500,000 hectares of cultivated land were lost, converted to industrial parks and zones (Thin, 2009).

¹⁴ This gap is seen in urban and rural areas, although both urban men and women were more likely to be engaged in wage employment than their rural counterparts (Lee, 2008).

¹⁵ ILO (2009) found that 78% of women were involved in the own-account and unpaid family work arena.

Women have been especially hard hit, since they are less able to take advantage of new employment opportunities if their land has been recovered (Nguyen et al., 2009; Thinh, 2009). In effect, 'trade reform [and land reform that preceded it] tends to advantage large and medium producers, since small farmers, especially women, often lack access to credit, new technologies, marketing know-how and the like needed to take advantage of new markets' (Cagatay, 2001, cited in Nguyen et al., 2009).

Here again, certain groups face even greater obstacles. For example, these risks and obstacles are compounded for ethnic minority women, who tend to be less literate and face additional barriers as a result of their ethnicity. They may be disadvantaged in credit markets because they are not members of mass-based organisations such as the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU), often necessary for accessing credit (ADB, 2005). Likewise, elderly women must cope with a particular set of vulnerabilities that derive from their disadvantaged position over the entire life-cycle. Because they did not enjoy even formal land rights earlier in life, they are less likely to enjoy land tenure security in their old age. Elderly women also face increased health risks owing to accumulated difficulties related to health care earlier in life, including lack of preventive care, poor quality health care and inadequate reproductive care. Not surprisingly, more female elderly than male (52.6% of women compared with 39.8% of men) reported poor health in the 2006 Family Survey (cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b). Finally, largely because they are underrepresented in the formal sector, women are less likely to earn state allowances or retirement pensions (19% of women versus 33% of men), and are therefore more likely to have insufficient income and less able to pay for needed medical care in old age (Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism et al., 2008, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b). In rural areas, this vulnerability is compounded by a growing trend of out-migration among younger workers that is undermining traditional family support systems, leaving behind the elderly and infirm (Cook, 2009).

Not only are women in Viet Nam disadvantaged in labour markets and access to productive resources, but also they tend to work longer hours than men (ADB, 2005). On the one hand, women's labour market participation rates rival men's (Lee, 2008) and are among the highest in the region. Similarly, women's labour force participation continues throughout their working years, without major interruptions for child bearing or child rearing (Haub and Phuong, 2004, cited in Knodel et al., 2004). On the other hand, women carry a greater burden than men within the household. Notwithstanding colonial-era observations that cited the relatively stronger position of Vietnamese women compared with Chinese women with respect to household decision making, recent studies suggest strong and resilient gender divisions of labour. Women still report making decisions on 'small items and spending', while men claim authority on 'big purchases and important issues' (MCD, 2008, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b). A 2001 study conducted in five provinces found that women are mainly responsible for domestic work, with no observed variation by age (Binh et al., 2002, cited in Knodel et al., 2004). These observations are confirmed quantitatively in a VWU study of time use, which estimated that women work an average of 13 hours a day, compared with nine hours for men (Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 2005, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b), with much of the additional time devoted to household chores. In fact, according to VHLSS 2006 data, close to half of all men over age six reported not doing any household work whatsoever (Lee, 2008). Similarly, care work is provided by women alone in more than half of families with children or elderly, disabled or sick members (VASS, 2008, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b). The heavier unpaid care burden for women not only potentially impacts negatively on health, but also decreases the opportunities to participate in local governance or social activities (ADB, 2005). Furthermore, these role divisions appear to have remained quite stable even in the face of significant economic and structural transformations from communist to capitalist regimes (Knodel et al., 2004).

3.2 Social risks and vulnerabilities

Despite having a much lower GDP per capita, Viet Nam compares favourably with the averages for East Asia and the Pacific on many key development indicators, including life expectancy, adult literacy rates and education enrolment, and is on track to achieve middle-income status very soon. Viet Nam has also made significant progress in reducing gender disparities, scoring relatively well both on the UNDP's 2007 Gender-related Development Index (94 out of 155) and on the Gender Empowerment Index (62 out of 109) (UNDP, 2009a; 2009b).

Viet Nam also performs quite well in delivering basic social services. Data on school enrolment show little difference between boys' and girls' enrolment, and adult literacy rates are high (World Bank et al., 2006). In fact, school attendance rates for girls aged 15-17 and 18-21 actually surpassed boys' attendance rates. Access to health care services is similarly widespread and certain health indicators, especially the infant and under-five mortality rates, have seen dramatic improvement over the past two decades. Overall, more than 75% of people, irrespective of gender, have access to some form of health care services (Lee, 2008). Coverage under Viet Nam's health insurance programme has expanded rapidly in recent years, including for the poor through the distribution of health insurance cards (Joint Donor Group, 2007). Gains from this can be seen in reductions in the infant mortality rate, which declined by more than half (from 36.7 per 1000 to 17.8) from 2000-2005, as well as a marked decline in the mortality rate for children under five, from 42.0 to 27.5 for the same period. In turn, life expectancy at birth rose by 3.5 years, from 67.8 to 71.3. Maternal mortality also declined, albeit at a slower rate, going from 85 per 100,000 live births in 2002 to 80 in 2005, still well behind the target of 70 by 2010.

Nevertheless, despite these clear overall improvements in human capital, a more nuanced examination reveals a number of persistent gender disparities. With respect to education, enrolment rates for ethnic minority girls, which are lower than for males or ethnic Kinh or Chinese girls, are a notable exception to these positive aggregate numbers (World Bank et al., 2006). Moreover, while enrolment rates for boys show no variation by ethnicity, rates for ethnic minority girls lag 10 percentage points behind their Kinh and Chinese counterparts among 15-17 year olds (ibid). One survey shows that nearly one-fifth of ethnic minority young women have never attended school (MOH/GSO, 2003, cited in World Bank et al., 2006). The literacy rate for Kinh and Chinese women is 92%, compared with 70% and 20%, respectively, for Thai and Hmong women (World Bank et al., 2006). Certain regions also show greater gender disparities in enrolment; for example, in the Northwest, 41% of school-aged males are enrolled compared with only 27% of females (Lee, 2008). Additionally, there is still room for improvement in ensuring universal access to quality of health care. For instance, domestic migrants, 70% of whom are women, have more limited access to health care services in cities, and the provision of sexual and reproductive health, counselling and treatment services – which are utilised more frequently by women – has been limited (World Bank et al., 2006). As in education, ethnic minority women benefit least, with 63-75% of ethnic group women in the northern mountains and the central part of the country giving birth at home.

To address these challenges, the Vietnamese government in recent years has made substantial efforts to improve gender equality by creating a better legislative and institutional enabling environment. Viet Nam was among the first countries to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1982, and amendments to the Constitution in 1992 take gender equality into account (World Bank et al., 2006). Recent laws such as the Gender Equality Law and the Law on Domestic Violence, both of which went into effect in 2007, followed other important legal advancements in women's rights, notably among which is the Land Law of 2003, which granted wives equal rights to be listed along with their husbands on land titles (Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 2003a). Agencies like the National Committee for the Advancement of Women and the VWU, in coordination with key national ministries, are the principle gender machineries responsible for carrying out legislative and policy mandates. Tables 3 and 4 summarise the current legal and institutional framework governing the advancement of gender equality in Viet Nam, also highlighting certain corresponding constraints to implementation.

Table 3: Gender-related legislation and policy provisions in Viet Nam

Policy or legal provision	Year	Description	Notes
National Law on Gender Equality	2007	This law was designed to embody CEDAW and corrects for gender disparities in existing legislation; calls for gender mainstreaming in all areas of public administration, the private sector, communities and the family; sets temporary measures including targets and quotas for women's participation in decision making; and suggests measures to facilitate implementation.	Implementation to date has been limited and under-resourced (Holmes and Jones, 2009b), in part because the breadth of the law makes it difficult to operationalise (Fitzgerald, 2010 personal correspondence). ¹⁶ However, a 2008 government decree ¹⁷ details guidelines for implementation, assigning primary responsibility for implementation to MOLISA in coordination with other relevant ministries. The important function of data collection is to be carried out by local-level People's Committees, coordinated through MOLISA, while data analysis formulation of gender-based indices and criteria at the national level is the responsibility of the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI).
Law on Domestic Violence	2007	This law prohibits domestic violence, which it defines broadly as 'an act intentionally committed by a family member, which causes harm or possibly causes harm in physical, emotional or economic terms on another family member'. ¹⁸ The law imposes fines on perpetrators and establishes a framework for prevention of domestic violence as well as for providing support to victims. It is also worth noting that the DVL is a civil law, and some forms of violence were already covered under the criminal code – the DVL defines violence more broadly however, i.e. it includes rape in marriage (Fitzgerald, 2010 personal correspondence).	Implementation is still in its early stages but government has been slow to devise a plan of action and implementation could otherwise be hampered by the recent institutional reorganisation that subordinated the former Committee for Population, Family and Children to MOCST, which could reduce the oversight capacity of offices responsible for family affairs.
Plan of Action for	2004,	The POA aims to increase	Existing legal and penal codes

¹⁶ Correspondence with Ingrid Fitzgerald, UN Gender Advisor, 2010.

¹⁷ 70/2008/ND-CP, www.ubphunu-ncfaw.gov.vn/index.asp?lang=E&func=newsdt&CatID=132&newsid=1797&MN=132.

¹⁸ Article 1 of the Domestic Violence Law.

<p>Prevention and Fighting Crimes of Trafficking in Women and Children 2004-2010</p>	<p>approved by the PM in 2005</p>	<p>awareness of and actions taken by government agencies, local authorities, mass organisations and society to more effectively fight trafficking and reduce the number of trafficked women and children significantly by 2010. The POA assigns primary responsibility for enforcement (investigation and prosecution) to the Ministry of Public Security (MPS), although other functions are assigned to relevant ministries and agencies (e.g. the VWU for awareness raising; the Border Commander for interdiction; MOLISA for reintegration; the Ministry of Justice for reviewing laws and legislation).</p>	<p>prohibiting trafficking are outdated (1985) and silent on the issue of consent of trafficking victims, creating a loophole that undermines prosecution (Hoang, 2008). The government has also signed several regional and international cooperation agreements to combat human trafficking, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on Transnational Crime (1997), the Regional Ministerial Conference on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (2002 Bali Process) and the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT, 2003), among others.</p>
<p>Ordinance on Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution</p>	<p>2003</p>	<p>This ordinance strictly prohibits prostitution, provides measures for prevention and punitive measures against customers, procurers and prostitution organisers.</p>	<p>The impact of the ordinance is punitive (see Art.23 which makes it clear that prostitutes can be subject to administrative sanctions), and contributes to social stigma and discrimination. Treatment, rehabilitation, reintegration and vocational training are provided by the state, but this is not necessarily voluntary in nature (Fitzgerald, 2010, personal correspondence).</p>
<p>Ordinance on Sanctions against Administrative Violations</p>	<p>2002</p>	<p>This ordinance called for prostitutes between the ages of 15 and 55 to be entered into special treatment clinics for three to 18 months.</p>	<p>There has been some degree of success in relation to awareness raising, as well as prosecuting criminal cases and treating and reintegrating prostitutes, but prostitution is still common because of the increasing sophistication of prostitution-related activities, high inequality, unemployment and 'the easy-going lifestyles of some' (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 2005).</p>
<p>Socio-Economic Development Plans (SEDP 1 2001-2005, SEDP 2 2006-2010)</p>	<p>2001, 2005</p>	<p>The SEDPs are the government's key documents outlining the five-year national development strategy for growth and poverty reduction. SEDP 2 has three main targeted outcomes: growth</p>	<p>SEDP 1 was aligned with the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy (CPRGS) and as a result did not adequately account for gendered dimensions of poverty or</p>

		(reach a per capita income of \$950-1000 by 2010); social development (improve people's material, cultural and spiritual life); and good governance (create institutional and infrastructure foundations for industrialisation and modernisation and transition to a knowledge-based economy) (ADB, 2006).	policies. SEDP 2 goes further in integrating gender as one of two crosscutting themes (the other being governance) and setting better gender-specific targets for poverty reduction and policy impacts.
Plans of Action on the Advancement of Women (POA 2 2001-2005, POA 3 2006-2010)	2001, 2005	POA 2 and POA 3 are components of the SEDP that outline the government's five-year strategies for advancing gender equality. POA 2 set concrete targets and actions to be taken by 2005 to improve gender equality in education and training, social contexts, the economy and legal frameworks and environments. Responsibility for implementing the plan lies with the National Commission for the Advancement of Women (NCAFW). POA 3 set specific gender targets and indicators with respect to labour and employment, education, health care, leadership/decision making and capacity building for the gender machinery.	Many of the POA 2 targets were achieved, and POA 3 took into account lessons from the previous process and adjusted targets accordingly. The Joint Donor Group (World Bank et al., 2006) has recommended more affirmative action policies for the successful achievement of many POA 3 targets, as well as devising ministry-specific gender targets –as opposed to macro-level – for the relevant sectoral ministries to facilitate the implementation process.
Land Law	2003	This law gave husbands and wives equal rights to be named on newly issued land titles. 'Where the land use right is a mutual asset of the wife and husband, the certificate of land use right must state the full names of both husband and wife' (Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 2003a). Similarly, when land use is divided among a number of individuals, family households or organisations, certificates must reflect this and be issued to each holder.	The law does not provide a mechanism to change existing land use certificates, so the gender imbalance in titles is difficult to correct in the short term. Also, awareness of the land issue and the change in law is limited, even among staff in the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DONRE), the administrative body responsible.
Ordinance on Population, Decree 104/2003/ND-CP	2003	This ordinance stipulates that each couple and individual has rights and responsibilities regarding health care, application of family planning measures and maintaining 'small-scale families'. Decree 104/2003/ND-CP presents guidelines and regulations to implement gender equality	The gender equality provisions represent important official stands against gender discrimination, including sex selection in family planning, but successful implementation depends on curbing deeply ingrained cultural values and social attitudes that discriminate against women

		provisions. It forbids interference with family planning measures and acts that harm or humiliate people using contraceptives or with only children (Art. 9), and prohibits sex selection (Art. 10). Gender equality provisions relate to discrimination against women and girls, assistance for women in reproductive health care, family planning and equal access to education, men's responsibility in family planning, etc.	and girls and will require clear enforcement mechanisms.
Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy	2001-2002	As its title suggests, the CPRGS, Viet Nam's poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP), heavily emphasised growth in its poverty reduction strategy. It incorporated gender, albeit superficially, into its framework as a result of inputs from the NCFAW based on the POA 2.	The CGPRS lacked concrete mechanisms for monitoring the gender impacts of policies and strategies.

Sources: ADB (2005); Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2005); World Bank et al. (2006).

Table 4: Gender-related agencies in Viet Nam

Agency or provision	Year	Description	Notes
National Committee for the Advancement of Women	1993	This is the primary national machinery responsible for promoting women's equality. Its function is to give advice to and supervise the implementation of policies towards women and campaign for and make reports on the implementation of CEDAW. The committee reports directly to the PM and is well poised to coordinate gender mainstreaming since it is made up of representatives from different sectors. It is also an umbrella for a network of Committees for the Advancement of Women (CAWAs) in all ministries and agencies and in all 64 provinces (ADB, 2005).	The NCFAW's effectiveness has been constrained by limited funding and lack of gender expertise to enable technical advice for ministries and provinces. In recent years, however, the NCFAW has developed guidelines for mainstreaming gender in the policymaking process; conducted training for public sector officials; and, in cooperation with UNDP, published a gender statistics booklet.
National Commission for Population, Family and Children, formerly National Committee on Population, Family and Children		The CPFC is responsible for state administration over child protection and coordinating the implementation of programmes for children (MOLISA/UNICEF, 2009). It also conducts the Population Change and Family Planning Survey and advises the government on family	The CPFC has played a key role in raising awareness about son preference and the consequent growing gender imbalance (ADB, 2005).

		<p>policies, including the preparation of the Viet Nam Family Strategy to 2010. CPFC functions have subsequently been decentralised – family planning and population issues have been moved to the Ministry of Health (MOH), family issues, including domestic violence prevention, have become the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism and child protection issues have been taken up by MOLISA.</p>	
Viet Nam Women’s Union		<p>The VWU is a mass-based organisation that traces its roots to the communist era. It facilitates implementation of projects and programmes at the grassroots level and also has representatives engaged in policy dialogue at the national level.</p>	<p>The WVU is involved in all manner of policies and programmes related to women, from supervising implementation at local level to research, but it is most heavily engaged in education/ dissemination/awareness-raising activities. Not all women are members; notable among those less likely to be members are ethnic minority women.</p>
Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Department of Gender Equality		<p>According to Executive Decree 70/2008/ND-CP, MOLISA is the primary ministry responsible for implementing the National Law on Gender Equality (including coordination of data collection) through its Department of Gender Equality in coordination with other relevant line ministries and lower levels of government. Otherwise, MOLISA’s functions are widespread, ranging from employment and labour regulations to social insurance, social assistance policies and social welfare (e.g. it plays a key role in child protection, preventing prostitution and trafficking as well as recovery/rehabilitation/ reintegration of victims).</p>	<p>It is possible that MOLISA is spread too thinly across numerous and diverse policy areas, raising concerns about capacity. However, that both the NTPPR and the Gender Equality Law are housed under MOLISA increases the potential for integrating more gender-sensitive targets and perspectives into NTPPR programmes.</p>
Department of Family, Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism		<p>MOCST is responsible for coordination of implementation of programs and plans on domestic violence prevention and control, development of family counselling and domestic violence counselling including support to victims, as well as</p>	

		<p>for training of officials (Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control, Law No. 02/2007/QH12, Hanoi). MOCST also “leads in collaboration with relevant ministries and sectors the development of a national program of action on domestic violence prevention and control for the 2010-2010 period” (Prime Ministerial Directive No. 16/2008/CT-TTg of 30 May 2008). The Family Department of MOCST is the focal point for these responsibilities.</p>	
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Sources: Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2005); NCFAW (2009); World Bank et al. (2006).

In terms of improving women’s representation in decision-making roles, Viet Nam has a mixed record. The country ranks relatively well (62 out of 109) on the most recent UNDP Gender Empowerment Index, which measures the extent to which women take an active part in economic and political life. Viet Nam also performs well on some measures of women’s representation in government, namely the percentage of women in Parliament. Currently, 127 out of 493 members (25.8%) of the National Parliament are women, ranking 36th in the world, behind only New Zealand (33.6%), Timor Leste (29.2%) and Australia (26.7%) in the Asia-Pacific region, according to figures published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU).¹⁹ Moreover, women’s representation in Parliament has improved over time (World Bank et al., 2006). Beyond sheer representative numbers, the *quality* of women’s participation on parliamentary committees continues to reflect women’s traditional roles: women are more represented on committees responsible for ‘soft’ issues, such as social affairs, culture, education and youth, and notably underrepresented on strategic committees, such as budget and economics, or defence and security (ADB, 2005, cited in World Bank et al., 2006). Indeed, even when women manage to occupy leadership roles, they often play a marginal role in decision making owing to embedded norms that favour men (Kabeer et al., 2005, cited in World Bank et al., 2006).

Moreover, although Viet Nam stands out as a relative success in terms of women’s representation in Parliament, by other measures progress has stalled. In particular, women appear to be very poorly represented in the executive, with none of the five deputy prime ministerial positions held by a woman and only one ministry of 22 (MOLISA) headed by a women.²⁰ Women in lower-level decision-making positions within the central executive are similarly underrepresented, where, with the exception of the lowest level positions of director and deputy director of divisions,²¹ the percentage of female leaders has hovered around 10% since the late 1980s (World Bank et al., 2006).²² Likewise, women’s participation in sub-national levels of government is quite limited, and indeed women’s representation declines with each descending level of government,²³ although

19 www.ipu.org/english/home.htm.

20 www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page?_pageid=439,1090566&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL.

21 Women’s representation in these positions stood at 25% and 33%, respectively, in 2005.

22 See Table 5 in World Bank et al. (2006).

23 In the period 1994-2004, women accounted for 22.3% of leaders at the provincial level, 20.1% at the district level and 16.6% at the commune level. These levels increased to 23.4%, 23% and 19.5% over 2004-2009, but women’s representation was still lowest at the local levels.

overall levels are increasing over time. More worrisome, however, is the recent decrease in women's representation at all levels of the judiciary. From 2001-2003, women's representation in the highest court (the Supreme People's Court (SPC)) declined by 6%, in the provincial courts by 3% and in the district courts by 13% (World Bank et al., 2006). These low levels of representation have been blamed on gender discrimination in recruitment and promotion, fuelled by slowly changing attitudes and cultural norms, which at lower levels are exacerbated by women's relatively lower educational qualifications (MPI/NCFAW, 2006, cited in World Bank et al., 2006).

Many cultural norms and social attitudes reflect ingrained gender stereotypes and serve to perpetuate gender-based disparities. Especially among ethnic Kinh/Chinese, these attitudes can be traced to traditional Confucian values that exalt men as heads of household and primary providers, with women beholden to a three-fold subordination to fathers, husbands and sons (Resurreccion and Ha, 2007). Although some observers note that the dominance of Confucianism is waning as a result of socialist policy and later economic integration, it 'still resonates in gender relations for the majority Kinh/Chinese population' (ADB, 2005). Indeed, as Resurreccion and Ha (2007) argue, the *Doi Moi* reforms, which shifted the locus of production from the farm collective to the household, in many ways revived these traditional Confucian norms of domesticity. These roles are further reaffirmed in the education system, especially through the school curriculum. Despite a growing commitment by the government to gender equality, school textbooks continue to portray stereotypical gender roles, thereby further entrenching stereotypical expectations and behaviours among younger generations (World Bank et al., 2006).²⁴ The fact that women are still expected to behave in a 'socially constrained way' contributes to inequalities, from representation in leadership positions to economic vulnerabilities to trafficking for prostitution (ADB, 2005).

Confucianism is also manifest in Viet Nam in the form of son preference, although these views are changing among younger generations. In part because the eldest son is thought to be solely capable of honouring and caring for parents as they age and in the afterlife, many fear that having a girl (or having no son) will break the 'pillar' of the family (ADB, 2005). For this reason, Liu (2004) attributes the historically higher school dropout rates and lower enrolment rates for girls to Confucian values that place a higher rate of return on boys' education. Girls are expected to 'fly away' upon marriage, their familial orientation and obligations shifting to the husband's family, so investments in daughters' education are seen as a loss. As a result, and because the sex of the child is typically known before birth, sex-selective abortion is a growing concern (ADB, 2005). Although sex selection is forbidden by decree, in 2003 the CPFC warned of an emerging gender imbalance, with higher than standard sex ratios not uncommon, especially in certain provinces.²⁵

In this vein, Viet Nam still struggles to contain certain social risks – including abortion, domestic violence, human trafficking and child labour – that often present specific threats to women and girls, especially in ethnic minority populations. By almost all estimates, Viet Nam has a high abortion rate,²⁶ with estimates ranging from (a still high) 20% of all pregnancies at the low end to 2002 MOH reports of 46%.²⁷ The rate appears to be increasing in recent years and is highest in urban areas (ADB, 2005). Apart from the societal risks associated with the growing gender imbalance resulting from sex selection in abortion, women who terminate pregnancies are at risk of

24 A review of a Grade 9 Vietnamese textbook, documenting the portrayal of female and male characters, found that all female characters were portrayed negatively (e.g. 'a female worker who leaves her job illegally' or 'a lady who does not repay her debts') and often in domestic situations (e.g. 'unhappy girl who marries early' or 'a girl who has premarital sex') and male roles were showed consistently positively (e.g. 'student recipient of national award' or 'head of the county award') or as career oriented (e.g. 'famous scientist' or 'professional medical doctor') (World Bank et al., 2006).

25 A survey by the CPFC of 16 cities and provinces showed 115 boys born to every 100 girls, compared with the natural rate of 106:100. An analysis of the 1999 census data showed that 13 of 64 provinces had higher than normal sex ratios, reportedly as high as 128:100 in the Mekong Delta province of An Giang (ADB, 2005). According to the 2009 Population Census, the national sex ratio at birth increased from 107 in 1999 to 110 in 2006 and 112 in 2008.

26 In Viet Nam, abortion has been legal and available on request since the early 1960s.

27 The lower estimates are based on household surveys, which generally underestimate the rate of pregnancy termination, since abortions are underreported in surveys and the data do not capture rates among unmarried women. The true rate is likely closer to the MOH 2002 estimates (ADB, 2005).

health problems and life-threatening complications. A Vietnam Demographic and Health Survey (VDHS) found that 50% of women had health problems after terminating a pregnancy, and UNDP estimates that 12% of maternal deaths can be attributed to complications from abortions that many health facilities are unprepared to treat (ADB, 2005). The high rate of abortion could also be a reflection of women's disproportionately high responsibility for family planning. While knowledge of family planning is very high (*ibid*), women carry most of the burden of fertility regulation, with use of contraceptives among men extremely low (ORC Macro, 2002, cited in Schuler, 2006). As a result of unequal sexual negotiating power, women also face a growing risk of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS. Indeed, the prevalence of unprotected sex in marriage has led to a situation in which women are now more likely to contract HIV from their partner than through drug use or sex work (World Bank et al., 2006).

Violence against women stands out as another enduring gender challenge. Domestic violence is increasingly recognised, evidenced by the passage of the 2007 Domestic Violence Law,²⁸ as a serious social problem. While data are difficult to come by, a 2006 government survey of 2000 people in eight provinces found that 2.3% of families reported some form of physical abuse in a year, 25% reported emotional violence and 30% reported coerced sex (Hoang, 2008). In a VWU study of Thai Binh, Lang Son and Tien Giang provinces, 40% of women reported having been hit by their husband at some point, and 66% of divorces were attributed to domestic violence (VWU, 2006, cited in World Bank et al., 2006). Scholars point to alcoholism and economic difficulties as the principal causes of domestic violence (e.g. Vu et al., 1999, cited in ADB, 2005; Kabeer et al., 2005, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b), which are related to deeply embedded socially prescribed roles for men and women, whereby men are expected to drink more (even excessively) and to be less able to control their tempers and women are responsible for maintaining harmony in the family (*ibid*). Women victims of domestic violence are reluctant to seek assistance, and authorities in the past have tended to minimise the problem (Vu et al., 1999 and Rydstrom, 2003, cited in Schuler, 2006). The VWU has historically taken charge of domestic violence cases at the community or household level, focusing on mediation and defusing conflict in the home, but access to welfare services, counselling and police and medical professionals is quite limited (IFGS, 2008, cited in Holmes and Jones, 2009b). The Domestic Violence Law, which incorporates a framework for prevention and support for victims, is a very encouraging step, but its effectiveness has yet to be thoroughly evaluated.²⁹

Human trafficking and prostitution constitute more public forms of gender-based violence against which Viet Nam has strict *de jure* regulations. Prostitution is considered a 'social evil' and is illegal; however, laws are relatively progressive in also punishing clients, procurers and organisers of trafficking or prostitution. In addition, prostitutes or trafficked women and children are legally eligible for health care, rehabilitation and job training, although in practice resources often fall short (ADB, 2005). Prostitution is heavily concentrated in the southern regions (MOLISA/UNICEF, 2009), with many prostitutes from the Southeast and Mekong River Delta regions (ILO-IPEC, 2002 and GSO, 2005, cited in ADB, 2005). Additionally, trafficking of women and children, especially girls, both within Viet Nam and internationally, for sexual and labour exploitation, forced marriage and domestic servitude is a serious problem. Despite a revised criminal code that imposes strict penalties for trafficking and a POA for Prevention and Fighting Crimes of Trafficking in Women and Children (see Table 3), in 2004 an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 Vietnamese women and girls were in Cambodia as sex workers (UNIFEM et al., 2004, cited in ADB, 2005). The Viet Nam Supreme Procuracy recorded a total of 115 court cases of trafficking in women and children in 2002 (GSO, 2005, cited in ADB, 2005).

28 The UN Population Fund praises the Domestic Violence Law but notes that it does not establish a legal framework for gender-based violence more generally (UNFPA, 2007).

29 Current law imposes a fine of VND500,000-1 million on perpetrators of domestic violence. Some observers have pointed out that this is potentially a weak deterrence mechanism, since many wives will be unwilling to report abuse if it means reducing household monetary resources (Nguyen, 2010).

Not surprisingly, child labour is also patterned along gender and ethnic lines. The government has taken specific measures³⁰ to combat child-specific vulnerabilities such as child prostitution, pornography and other harmful forms of child labour, but many children, especially girls, remain vulnerable. Child trafficking for prostitution and forced marriage are particularly sinister risks to young girls, and are associated strongly with family poverty and indebtedness (ILO-IPEC, 2002, cited in ADB, 2005). An estimated 13% of prostitutes are under 18 years of age (MOLISA/UNICEF, 2009).³¹ Children from southern regions along the border of Cambodia are especially at risk of being trafficked for prostitution (ILO-IPEC, 2002, cited in ADB, 2005). Child labour in general is a more common household strategy among ethnic minorities than ethnic Kinh/Chinese, although girls are consistently more likely to work than boys across ethnic groups (MOLISA/UNICEF, 2009; World Bank et al., 2006). According to a 2006 World Bank Gender Analysis of the 2004 VHLSS, girls aged 11-14 years, regardless of ethnicity, work approximately twice as much as boys in the same age group, with the gender gap declining somewhat for children aged 15-17. Ethnic minority children are reportedly more likely to be engaged in child labour than their Kinh/Chinese counterparts: more than 40% of ethnic minority girls aged 11-14 work (compared with just under 20% of ethnic minority boys and over 30% of Kinh/Chinese), and more than 70% of ethnic minority girls aged 15-17 work (compared with 60% of Kinh/Chinese girls and just over 40% of ethnic minority boys) (ibid). There has also been an increase in the number of children, primarily girls, working outside of their homes as hired domestic workers. These children are especially vulnerable to exploitation – they tend to work long hours (13 hours a day, seven days a week), be less likely to attend school (only about 11% based on a recent survey in Ho Chi Minh City), be closely monitored by their employers and have very little free time (MOLISA/UNICEF, 2009).

3.3 Overview of research site vulnerabilities

The above discussion mapped out aggregate gender differences at the national level. However, given the cultural, ethnic, agro-ecological and religious diversity that characterises Viet Nam, not surprisingly there is also significant variability across regions. In this section, therefore, we spotlight the context-specific economic and social vulnerabilities experienced by men and women in the two provinces under study: An Giang, in the Mekong River Delta region of southern Viet Nam, and Ha Giang, in the impoverished Northeast highlands of the country (see Table 2 in Section 2 above) and the coping strategies at their disposal. Drawing on the survey data as well as the life history interviews, this provides the context for our analysis on the gendered impacts of the NTPPR in the sections that follow.

In terms of the specific economic vulnerabilities experienced in our research sites, our findings highlight the importance of agricultural and food security concerns. Common problems identified include insufficient water for irrigation, inadequate access to land, death of livestock owing to environmental shocks (e.g. severe cold of winter 2007/08 in Ha Giang province) and rising agricultural input and fertiliser prices. In the Ha Giang province sites, additional vulnerabilities include food price shocks (especially rice and maize) in 2008 and a lack of buffalo for ploughing; in An Giang province, declining employment opportunities (especially because of increasing farm mechanisation) and insufficient capital to invest in farming improvements were highlighted. Expenses relating to life-cycle and religious ceremonies are another source of persistent

30 Viet Nam, in 1990, was the first country in the region and the second in the world to sign on to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Since then, several child-sensitive policies and programmes have been enacted and/or implemented. Examples include National Programmes of Action for Children 1991-2000 and 2001-2010; the Law on Protection, Care and Education of Children; the Programme on the Prevention of and Solution to the Situation of Street Children, Sexually Abused Children and Children Working under Heavy or Hazardous Conditions 2004-2010; Child Sexual Abuse Prevention Project (along with guidelines for implementation); and most recently the National Plan of Action for Children Affected by HIV and AIDS in Viet Nam; among others (MOLISA/UNICEF, 2009).

31 Although it imposes strict penalties, Vietnamese law is rather permissive in its definition of children and the age of consent for sex. The age threshold for consensual sex is 13; any sexual activity with a child under 13 is strictly forbidden. Between the ages of 13 and 16, children can give valid consent for sex with another minor (peer consent), but adults are prohibited from engaging in sex with children under 16 (MOLISA/UNICEF, 2009).

vulnerability. In Ha Giang, funerals (which tend to range from VND2-12 million) and fees for traditional priests called upon during serious illness often present particular challenges, whereas in An Giang costs related to Buddhist festivals and birth and marriage ceremonies are problematic. In addition to these persistent economic risks, respondents also noted that the impacts of the global economic crisis are compounding poor rural households' vulnerability (see Box 4).

Box 4: Crisis-related vulnerabilities

Both policy dialogues and media reports to date have focused largely on the impact of the global economic crisis on workers in export industries. As a recent survey by the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences reported, migrant workers to industrial parks have been among the most visible casualties of the crisis, with thousands facing redundancy in early 2009. While some have sought to stay in urban areas drawing on their meagre savings to seek new employment, others have been forced to return home to their rural villages. This has had a doubly negative impact – not only are households losing vital remittance payments but also returnees are seeking employment when the demand for hired labour is falling.

Crisis monitoring efforts have been slower however to track the impacts on rural communities. The Institute of Policy Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development affiliated with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) has undertaken research with farmer associations but these results have not been widely disseminated. Preliminary evidence from monitoring efforts by the Committee of Ethnic Minority Affairs (CEMA) suggests that many poor rural households in the Central Highlands are having to draw down on their savings to weather the impacts of the crisis. Respondents reportedly lamented that they are *'having to eat their investments'* (CEMA senior official, Hanoi, 2009) and that this is just a short-term strategy – a number of people interviewed feared that they will have to sell off land to survive within one to two years.

Another problem highlighted was the difficulties in the farm labour market. Families are increasingly having to rely on household labour only – rising agricultural input prices mean that they cannot offer higher wages whereas labourers need to calculate if they will earn enough money for a basic food basket. Previously, they would accept VND80,000 but now they need at least VND100,000 to make ends meet. As one respondent noted, *'If prices go up, I will die'*.

Research by ActionAid on the global crisis impacts underscores that there are also significant social consequences. Children are being withdrawn from schools, weddings and other social activities are being halted and there is increasing vulnerability to exploitation. While migrant workers are certainly vulnerable in Viet Nam as a result of their non-resident status and lack of access to basic services, it is young people in households that are too poor to send migrant workers to urban areas that are often the most vulnerable. These households typically lack vital social capital and support networks and, without such ties and knowledge about what to expect in terms of employment conditions, they are susceptible to exploitation by human trafficking networks. ActionAid highlights that many young people are often not aware of what will happen in destination areas and tend to see their plight as bad luck rather than as a human rights issue.

Sources: Interviews with World Bank researchers, CEMA and ActionAid (2009).

Gender also appears to act as an important filter in how respondents experience poverty and vulnerability (see also Box 5). Significantly more women identified serious family illness (9% versus 0%) and limited access to credit (6% vs. 2.4%) as key risks over the past five years, whereas men were more likely to complain of the death of livestock (34.1% vs. 19.4%), inadequate access to land (9.8% vs. 4.5%) and unemployment (26.8% vs. 17.9%). Gender of household head also shapes the vulnerability experiences: female-headed households were more likely to report unemployment (37.5% vs. 21.7%) and serious family illness (12.5% vs. 4.3%) as a major source of vulnerability than their male counterparts, whereas male-headed households were more concerned with inadequate access to land (10.9% vs. 0%). For more detail on health vulnerabilities, see Box 4.

Box 5: Health vulnerabilities

A life history analysis highlighted that ill-health is a key vulnerability for many poor households at various stages in the life-cycle. A number of respondents rely on traditional healers and medicine, which has consequences in terms of costs and quality of care. For instance, an adolescent boy from Pac Ngam dropped out of school for a term to rest after a medical doctor at the local hospital was unable to diagnose any problem (Male adolescent, Pac Ngam, 2009); a middle-aged man's family borrowed heavily to afford herbal medicines and the services of a local shaman who warned him to stay away from crossroads in order

to overcome his mental ill-health (Married woman, Xin Chai, 2009). Another family explained that two of their children have been ill for two to three years but have never been to a hospital; instead, they have sold assets (livestock and paddy fields) to cover the costs of a traditional healer (Married man, Chi Sang, 2009).

Others lamented that they are unable to afford medical help. One female household head explained that she is unable to seek treatment for her youngest son's asthma because she cannot take time out from work:

'If he goes to hospital, who will feed us? We are only a mother and a son you know' (Married woman, Co To, 2009).

Similarly, another parent has had to pawn his rice field to cover medical costs for his son as he lacks medical insurance:

'My youngest was born in 2006 and fell sick in 2007 – he was in a lot of pain but we didn't have money so we had to pawn our paddy field for VND3-4 million. We spent about a million on the medical expenses but then we also had to pay for meals, then transportation expenses to the hospital – so there was no money left' (Married man, Co To, 2009).

Indeed, transport costs to access health care were a common concern:

'Our third child became seriously ill and the doctor recommended we urgently visit the district hospital. But I couldn't find my bicycle. I carried him on my back and ran. A good woman told me about a motorbike driver [xe om]. My eyes were full of tears. The motorbike driver chased after me and told me that he would take me to hospital at the price of VND20,000 dong. I told him I was in so much of a hurry that I didn't remember to bring money. I gave him just VND15,000. He helped take my son to hospital' (Married woman, 44 years, Che Qua, 2009).

Ill-health also tends to erode human capital development over the life-course:

'I left school to stay home and take care of the housework when I was 13 as my mother became sick while giving birth to my youngest brother. After this all I could do was sell tapioca and sweet potatoes to my neighbours in exchange for rice. I regret not continuing in school' (Married woman, To An Village, 2009).

Respondents also identified a number of important social risks. Women's time poverty was highlighted across all sites. Intra-household tensions around the division of labour between husband and wife was also a frequent concern, although in Ha Giang it was emphasised that domestic violence is not a major concern – not because intra-household relations are egalitarian but rather because culturally wives are taught to be submissive to their husbands. The same was true for discrimination against the poor, who tend to be labelled 'lazy' and 'ignorant'.

In Ha Giang province, language also emerged as a critical source of vulnerability among women. Because women are unable to use their mother tongue at the market and tend to send their men folk to spaces where Vietnamese is required (e.g. health centres or commune centres), many have very limited Vietnamese language skills, which renders them relatively isolated and also reduces income-generating opportunities. A high proportion of women surveyed were also illiterate, further exacerbating their social exclusion.

Box 6: Gendered vulnerabilities

Girls and women in the research sites face a range of gender-specific vulnerabilities. Beginning in childhood, girls were reported to be more likely to drop out of school owing to care work and domestic work demands:

'Girls have to look after their younger siblings, glean rice, sell lottery tickets. They are more likely to drop out of school than are boys' (DOLISA official, An Giang, 2009).

'Our family is poor so I asked my 14-year-old daughter to give up studying when she was in Grade 6 to take care of the housework' (Married man, Co To, 2009).

'Girls only finish Grade 6 and then they get married ... Only girls whose parents do something big in the commune or district go to high school. Girls don't like learning. They like getting married. Boys like learning'

... I will marry an elementary school girl so that she can stay at home to help my mother' (Male adolescent, Pac Ngam, 2009).

Boys, however, tend to be in demand for physical labour in some poor households:

'Boys can do many types of work. Smash rocks, carry rocks. The girls only cut rice' (Adolescent male, Co To, 2009).

In times of household economic stress, women also reported being more likely to reduce food consumption in order to ensure family well-being:

'I try to let my children have more education. I go without food a little bit to let the children go to school a little bit more, so that they have a good future like other children' (Widow, To An, 2009).

However, overwhelmingly men appear to be the main decision makers in the household:

'I ask my wife's opinion before I do things, but I have studied more, so I make the final decisions' (Married man, To An, 2009).

'I decide everything, and whatever she does she will ask me first. She won't do anything unless I tell her to' (Married man, Co To, 2009).

'Husbands are the ones who take care of great matters [such as loans], so I can't say much ... He didn't tell me anything about the loan. He thinks a wife knows nothing. I didn't talk to him about the [loan repayment] deadline or the interest because it would make my husband's family worry too, and I was afraid it would upset him. He says I don't know anything so I couldn't ask. I was too afraid to ask him' (Married woman, Coc Cot, 19 years, 2009).

This is reinforced by women's general lack of financial independence:

'If we had money, we would earn a lot, like other people, but we do not have any money or fields. It is easy to work – if you have capital you can do almost anything. Money is the force for a business ... I want my children to go to school. To keep going to school. If I had money, I would let them get more education. I also want to let my daughter, who finished Grade 11 and is now working in the village, continue her studies but I don't have enough money' (Widow, To An, 2009).

And in some cases by gender-based violence:

'My married life was tough. My husband was a jealous type. He didn't want me to go out, even to go to work. That made me exhausted. He beat me around my head and face, and tried to choke me. When I got up, my face was black and blue. I couldn't eat. My sister came to see me and she took me to hospital. My husband came to hospital to take me home. He said he would never beat me anymore. But he continued ... My eldest child was nine years old when he passed away. My husband beat him so hard on the stomach that it made his stomach swollen. People said that my husband's beating led to the problems with his liver and heart. The child's body was black and blue after being beaten. When he was taken to Tuyen Quang Hospital, he died. My husband was unbearable. I thought he would feel sorry after beating our child to death and he would no longer beat me. But he continued beating me seriously. I lived with him for nine years and this period of time was like living in prison. No one helped me – they were too afraid of my husband and what he would do' (Married woman, Che Qua, 2009).

Despite inferior decision-making power, women are expected to work more than men:

'When the Muong people let a daughter get married, it means that they have lost a person to help. Then they are sad. By contrast, mothers have to pay a lot of money to get a daughter-in-law, so she cannot be happy. Women work much harder than men, they have to raise children and work. Men do not do housework' (Widow, Ngan Chai, 2009).

'Women like doing more. The more they work, the more they like doing' (Adolescent male, Pac Ngam, 2009).

'Women have to do many things. They work more than men' (Married woman, Che Qua, 2009).

'I quit school in Grade 8 because my mother told me that she needed help at home. In some months, the water ran out and my mother and I had to wake up at 3am to collect water from a long way away. Men do not do this. I took a break from farming only right after I gave birth ... All husbands are the same. When he wants to smoke I have to continue to work' (Married woman, Coc Cot, 2009).

In the case of female-headed households, although women have autonomy in decision making, women reported struggling as a result of lack of resources as well as know-how on traditionally male responsibilities.

'Last October the flood damaged my house so I suffered a big loss ... As a woman living alone, I did not know how to overcome this. I went to pray. As a woman, I don't know how to repair my house to make it the same as it was. When my husband died, I didn't know how to manage ... I had to borrow money from my neighbours and I then paid them back later when I got money' (Widow, Ngan Chai, 2009).

'I ask you where can I go? Just going around to see what to do to feed my child, I can't go far now. I work as a servant for families, washing, helping with housework, cleaning, sweeping floors ... people ask me to come and help them. I had to borrow millions for my husband's funeral – I borrowed it from various people, asked parents, sisters, brothers. I still have VND1.5 million of debt, borrowed from outsiders. They keep asking me to pay it back. I say I am in difficulties but they charge high interest' (Widow, To An, 2009).

In order to cope with the above-mentioned intersecting economic and social vulnerabilities, our findings suggest that households rely predominantly on formal/government social protection mechanisms (such as cash or asset transfers – 42%) and individual efforts (undertaking additional paid or unpaid work, organising rotating labour during harvests, fishing and frog catching to supplement food supply, borrowing buffalo for ploughing, reducing quality and quantity of food consumption, making new rice terraces – 38%). Far fewer households resort to adverse coping strategies (including distress sale of assets, increasing indebtedness, mortgaging land to wealthy farmers, relying on family for food and child care, relying more on children's labour inputs and withdrawing children (mainly girls) from school – 5.6%); and social/community-based forms of help (relying on family members, social networks – 7.4%). These patterns were largely similar across our research sites, although households in Ha Giang were more likely to call on extended family (78.4%), self-help groups (66.7%) and trade associations (82.4%); An Giang respondents rely more on neighbours (78.9%) and religious organisations (12.3%) for help during times of distress.

There were also some important gendered differences. Male respondents were much more likely to identify individual efforts as an important coping mechanism (51.2% vs. 23.9%), as were male-headed versus female-headed households (40.2% vs. 31.3%); female-headed households are more prone to resort to adverse individual efforts (12.5% vs. 4.3%). In terms of social capital, male headed households reported higher overall levels, especially among extended family (68.5% vs. 43.8%), neighbours (77.2% vs. 62.5%), self-help groups (46.7% vs. 25%), trade associations (51.1% vs. 12.5%) and community leaders (13% vs. 6.3%). Female-headed households are more reliant on women's associations (81.3% vs. 42.4%) and religious organisations (50% vs. 23.9%).

4. Social protection responses to gendered vulnerabilities

4.1 Viet Nam's social protection system

Viet Nam has a long tradition of state-led social welfare programmes and initiatives to address poverty and vulnerability. Even so, the array of initiatives put in place in recent decades has been described by some as 'ad hoc, poorly funded, and largely reliant on scarce local resources' (van de Walle, 2003). Market-oriented reforms in the 1980s and 1990s included the disbandment of the communes in 1988, which under the collective and cooperative period had provided education, health, assistance and social security in times of life-cycle risks and shocks.³² This left individuals to carry a greater burden with regard to social provision and protection. As such, some scholars (e.g. Kolko, 1997 and Glewwe and Litvack, 1998, cited in van de Walle, 2003) have pointed to a paradox of liberalisation: people may have grown richer but they also may well be more vulnerable.

Currently, Viet Nam's core social protection scheme consists of a combination of social insurance and a range of social assistance programmes targeted at poor households as well as a diverse set of groups deemed to be vulnerable (including the elderly and disabled). In recent years, however, significant efforts have been made to coordinate and consolidate these programmes, although coverage is still quite low³³ (van de Walle 2003), and the schemes tend to be regressive (Evans and Harkness, 2008, cited in Roelen and Evans, 2008). The Hunger Elimination and Poverty Reduction (HEPR) programme,³⁴ first implemented in 1996, reflected an effort on the part of the government to consolidate existing programmes and initiatives in order to better mobilise and coordinate food security and anti-poverty resources. These efforts to bundle programme initiatives were further continued under the NTPPR, an umbrella programme under which social assistance subsidies for households living below the poverty line are administered (see Box 7 below).³⁵ As such, it encompasses the previous HEPR programme (2001-2005) and Programmes 132 and 134, which support ethnic minorities using measures such as housing support and land distribution (see Box 7 for further details). The 2008 mid-term review, however, found that in practice the NTPPR has been implemented in a rather fragmented way, with government agencies responsible for various programme components only weakly coordinated, if at all, and potential synergies not adequately realised (MOLISA/UNDP, 2009) (see Section 6 for more detail).

Box 7: Core objectives of the NTPPR

Unlike its predecessor, the HEPR, which was concerned primarily with eradicating hunger and malnutrition, the NTPPR is conceptualised as a comprehensive programme seeking to address a range of deprivations among poor households and communities. It focuses on improving the productive capacity of the poor, primarily through credit schemes; improving access to basic services; and building capacity for implementation and monitoring. Economic support to beneficiaries can come in the form of credit,³⁶ land holding, agricultural extension services, legal aid and improved infrastructure. However, the programme also

32 The communes financed the services with some contributions from the central government.

33 The national social insurance system provides pensions and maternity and disability benefits to formal sector workers, but coverage is quite limited and legacies from the socialist era imply significant obligations to large numbers of former employees of government- and state-owned enterprises. Pensions make up almost two-thirds of total social benefits in Viet Nam (Gao et al. 2009).

34 A HCFFP was established under the HEPR in 2002, including Free Health Card for the Poor, under which the poor are given a fully subsidised health insurance card that covers a comprehensive package of services (MOLISA/UNICEF, 2009). An estimated 14 million people benefited from this scheme from 2001-2004, although quality of care at local levels was limited and many people in remote areas had limited access to province- or central-level medical services. These initiatives represented only a subtle change in policy direction from their predecessors, but they did impose targets and poverty mandates on ministries that have been criticised as having unfunded mandates (ibid).

35 Poor households are selected according to a nationally defined poverty line, although in practice criteria vary according to community input, local norms and meanings (Holmes and Jones, 2009b; Roelen and Evans, 2008).

36 Provision of credit is the largest component of this area: by 2008, of VND43.5 trillion allocated to the NTPPR, 60% had gone to the provision of preferential credit (Joint Donor Group, 2007).

has a marked human capital dimension: it seeks to improve access to education and training through school fee exemptions, vocational training and loans for tertiary education, and it also supports health and sanitation access and service provision through a health insurance programme for the poor, as well as investments in housing, clean water and extension services.

The NTPPR is closely linked (although apparently administratively separate) with Programme 135,³⁷ which geographically targets development assistance to poor communes in Viet Nam, where NTPPR beneficiaries who live in P135 target communities stand to gain from both programmes. Now in its second phase (P135 II), this programme provides basic infrastructure such as schools, roads, health facilities, electricity, etc, to 'extremely difficult' communities in mountainous areas or areas with high concentrations of ethnic minorities. In 2009, Resolution 30A was introduced, with the aim of addressing rural socioeconomic development in a comprehensive manner. Focused on the 62 poorest districts, its objective is to narrow the gap between these communes and the rest of the country through capacity building, especially in soft skills for commune officers, and block grants to encourage more tailored decentralised approaches to development. With \$15 billion in funding, its size is unprecedented in Viet Nam, and it is hoped that it will make a major contribution to addressing regional disparities.

Sources: Joint Donor Group (2007); MOLISA/UNDP (2009); interviews with MARD and MPI (2009).

Currently, a new National Social Protection Strategy is being designed, led by MOLISA and supported by the donor community under the leadership of German Development Cooperation (GTZ). The broad aim of the new strategy is to provide a more comprehensive vision of social safety nets for all Vietnamese and to reduce the current short-term approach to poverty reduction and risk mitigation (see Section 6 for more detail). As the Head of the Department of Labour, Culture and Social Affairs in MPI (interview, 2009) argues:

'Because social protection is currently based on short-term measures, the government has to work very hard to see what needs responding to. But this is too reactive an approach. We need a longer-term vision so all can benefit even if the context changes, such as the 2008-2009 economic crisis or a natural disaster.'

However, key informant interviews suggested that there are some unresolved concerns with the strategy draft,³⁸ including inadequate risk and poverty dynamics analysis and a one-size-fits-all approach with little differentiation between chronic, transient and new poor or sedentary and migrant populations (Senior Economist, World Bank, 2009), as well as weak integration of care economy factors (Gender Advisor, UN Resident Coordinators Office, 2009) (see below).

4.2 Engendering poverty reduction and social protection in Viet Nam

In recent decades Viet Nam, much like China, has emphasised growth over other development goals, including gender equality (Gao et al., 2009; Schech, 2007). Viet Nam's national strategy documents for poverty reduction and social and economic development reflect this growth-oriented focus: while they acknowledge issues of social inclusion and gender equality as general goals, they fail to articulate concrete gender-based targets or mechanisms. Aptly named the Comprehensive Poverty Reduction and Growth Strategy, Viet Nam's PRSP was approved by the government in 2002 and conceptualised poverty reduction as a 'growth dynamic' rather than 'passive redistribution' (cited in Schech, 2007). Although the process is generally considered to have been inclusive and included feedback from the NCFAW and the VWU in the drafting stages, the document nevertheless presents a relatively weak gender-sensitive analysis, with few concrete mechanisms for monitoring the gender impacts of strategies (Schech, 2007). In its analysis of macroeconomic strategies, the CPRGS is conspicuously silent on the gender-specific impacts of trade liberalisation, subsidies, privatisation, tax reform and other important developmental

³⁷ The NTPPR and P135 are discussed in separate terms in policy documents, although they are often analysed together as complementary programmes.

³⁸ Indeed, in October 2009 the strategy was on its sixth draft and a number of key informants lamented that their feedback had not been adequately reflected.

processes, such as urbanisation or industrialisation, although it does acknowledge the need to promote women's access to credit and skills development (Schech, 2007). The CPRGS also recognises the existence of gender inequalities and presents some general targets in relation to poverty, job creation, education, health, political representation and the judicial system, but rather superficially attributes these to social and cultural practices (ibid).

The 2006-2010 SEDP³⁹ represents some progress, including the identification of gender – along with good governance – as a crosscutting theme crucial for the achievement of socioeconomic goals (ADB, 2006). The relatively more thorough treatment of gender in SEDP 2, as well as in POA 3 on the Advancement of Women, has been attributed to efforts by the NCFAW. The SEDP in particular was able to incorporate gender-specific indicators in areas such as agriculture, employment, environment, health and education, but clear guidelines for implementation remain to be established (ADB, 2005). The 2007 Gender Equality Law constitutes another positive step towards mainstreaming gender in concrete ways in Viet Nam's national development and poverty reduction approaches, but implementation has been slow to get off the ground (interviews with the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and UNDP, 2009). Resolution 48, introduced in mid-2009, is expected to provide more concrete guidance (ibid).

Some analysts also believe that there is scope to integrate gender into social protection programming, given the government's strong commitment to women's economic participation. As such, there is a growing need to tackle child care provision, and the current implicit assumption that 'the care economy will pick up the slack' (UN Gender Advisor, 2009) is likely to be increasingly challenged. Moreover, because social protection coverage is currently limited largely to the formal sector, it does not include a number of female-concentrated occupations, including vending, agriculture and the entertainment industry. There is therefore an urgent need to map the vulnerabilities that women face and to think through what they need in terms of social protection – whether it be credit, health insurance, employment insurance or vocational training, etc. Additional gendered demographic factors will also need to be considered, especially the growing aging population, which is disproportionately female, and the worsening sex ratio, as families elect to have smaller families but continue to favour sons as a result of cultural traditions (ibid).

4.3 Gender dimensions of NTPRR programme design

Despite broader progress towards the integration of gender dimensions into national development initiatives, the NTPRR pays very little attention to the gendered nature of poverty and vulnerability. In fact, apart from the targeting of female-headed households and a general mention of the need for gender-sensitive programming, it contains no gender-specific targets or measurable outcomes. It also omits to call for the collection or analysis of sex-disaggregated data at central or local levels. Not surprisingly then, the mid-term evaluation report was quite weak in its analysis of the gendered dimensions of poverty and vulnerabilities and of programme impacts on beneficiaries. For instance, the unit of analysis for the estimated coverage of NTPRR projects and policies was either 'the household' or 'people', and no differentiated figures for men or women, boys or girls are provided (MOLISA/UNDP, 2009).

It did, however, recommend that more attention be paid to gender dimensions, as understandings of poverty in the country move away from absolute deprivation towards relative need and more multidimensional concepts, reflected in Viet Nam's Development Goals, a more far-reaching set of well-being indicators than the MDGs. These include gender disparities in accessing primary health care and education, women's access to decent work and 'issues of voice and the ability to participate in decision-making' (MOLISA/UNDP, 2009).

39 The SEDP 2001-2005 by contrast largely overlooked gender variables.

5. Effects on individuals, households and communities

5.1 Impacts at the individual and household level

While there are general concerns about targeting errors,⁴⁰ existing evidence suggests that women may not be disadvantaged as NTPPR beneficiaries. One recent study by Roelen and Evans (2008) explores the impacts of social protection on child poverty in Viet Nam using both monetary and multidimensional definitions of poverty and VHLSS 2006 data. The authors find that children living in female-headed households⁴¹ and households with separated and uneducated heads or large proportions of children are more likely to be covered in the case of monetary poverty, while ‘multi-dimensionally poor’ children living in single-headed households or households headed by widows are more likely to be covered than those living in married households.⁴² Our research confirmed this finding, but suggested varied gendered impacts once NTPPR programme components were disaggregated.

First, a key tangible impact raised by all focus groups was the importance of the health insurance card. Households are able to save scarce resources (previously, costs ran into the tens of thousands of dong; now they are more likely to be in the hundreds of thousands dong) and avoid loans for hospital costs and/or giving traditional healers in-kind payments (e.g. wine or chickens). Moreover, access to health clinics means that they and their children are able to recover more quickly. For women this is especially important, not only because women and children tend to fall ill more often but it also because they do not have to stay home so long to tend to their sick children. The card has also enabled women to address reproductive health concerns as well as facilitating their access to contraceptives, even without the agreement of their husbands.

A second important impact related to the school fee exemption. There was general agreement that, because of the exemption policy, which includes free notebooks and textbooks, more children are going to school for longer (especially Grades 5-9), including girls.

‘Without the school fee remission, we could not afford our children’s schooling’ (Female focus group, Soc Triet, 2009).

There was also an appreciation that by going to school children are able to learn the Kinh language, so it is easier for them to communicate at the market and elsewhere and facilitate opportunities to engage in trade and business without having to rely on others.

However, other factors still serve as a barrier to the poorest households investing in their children’s education. In one Ha Giang site, focus group discussants pointed out that other costs (especially school clothing and transport), long distances to schools (accompanying children to school eats into parents’ working time) and demand for child labour (especially to tend buffalo) are significant barriers to school attendance. In An Giang, parents also noted that poor children *‘feel ashamed as they do not have bicycles, new clothes, new shoes, new bags and money to buy snacks like other children’* (Male focus group, To An, 2009) and are frequently expected to make other payments to the school to cover accident insurance and, in the case of boarding schools, water and electricity. Fathers were reported to be against girls’ school attendance because they are likely to see little

40 The programme has been heavily criticised for targeting errors that result from criteria that are either less than transparent or inconsistently applied (Roelen and Evans, 2008; van de Walle, 2004; UNDP et al., 2008).

41 This result was significant at the $p < .05$ level.

42 However, the risk of poor children being excluded from the NTPPR increases with the age of the head of household. Ethnicity and region also play a role: being an ethnic minority increases the risk of exclusion from the NTPPR (in the case of monetary poverty) by 69%, while poor children living in the South Central Coast region are relatively less likely to be excluded than those in any of the other regions (Roelen and Evans, 2008).

gain from their investment, given that girls marry into other families rather than supporting their parents over the life-course.

'Many girls are not going to school so they will be like their mothers – illiterate and have a hard life' (Female focus group, Chi Sang, 2009).

Access to credit emerged as another key programme impact. Loans were reported to be facilitating purchase of livestock. In the Ha Giang sites, loans are used to purchase cows and buffalo, which allows for more effective ploughing and in turn better grain and rice yields; in An Giang, money is often borrowed to buy pigs. Loans are also used to obtain fertiliser – either substituting it for animal manure or purchasing chemicals. Credit emerged as especially important for women, as they often take charge of the purchase of livestock, making a useful contribution towards the household economy and allowing women more say over household resources. However, others noted that this adds to women's work burden.

Overall, there were also some concerns about the limited availability of loans, their short timeframe and the long waiting time involved. Indeed, the VWU has identified shortage of credit and insufficient loan amounts to enable households to escape poverty as a key challenge in the NTPPR. Accordingly, the VWU acts as an intermediary between poor households and the Bank of Social Policy or the Agricultural and Rural Development Bank, helping poor women with the loan application process.⁴³

Several important differences in terms of programme impacts between the An Giang and Ha Giang sites were also raised. Food consumption was not discussed in FGDs in An Giang, but discussants in Ha Giang emphasised that the frequency of meals has increased and the variety of food they consume has improved – less *mèn mén* (corn starch) and more rice and more varieties of corn in general, and better quality meals, including meat, for elderly family members. However, there are still notable food shortages for two or three months each year owing to a shortage of paddy fields.

In An Giang, support to improve housing is a valued programme impact: focus group discussants highlighted that they no longer need to fear the rain and cold as house leaks have been fixed, and they are less anxious about adverse weather conditions. This was seen as especially important to women, as culturally they are in charge of the home domain. Vocational training was also identified as a benefit of NTPPR participation. Discussants in To An have gained knowledge on how to raise cows and pigs and to treat them when they are sick; in Soc Triet, women in particular noted that they have benefited from the new knowledge.

Programme beneficiaries also noted several intangible gains, especially in terms of more harmonious intra-household relations. By relieving pressure on overstretched household resources, couples were reportedly happier and less likely to quarrel, especially those in the Ha Giang sites, which have historically faced high levels of food insecurity. Both male and female focus group discussants also highlighted that there is more discussion among husbands and wives about the use of household resources, especially after taking loans. In households where women have taken out loans to engage in petty trade and/or participated in vocational training, women reported greater respect and less violence from their husbands as a result of their economic contribution and new knowledge.

'When the husband gets drunk, he may talk nonsense but no longer beats his wife and children' (Male focus group, Chi Sang, 2009).

⁴³ Nationally, 2.7 million households get credit through the VWU, which helps women develop credit application proposals on how they will use the money and also pay it back. The VWU also monitors how credit is being used and repayment plans. Because it knows families well, it can help early on if problems arise (Deputy Director, VWU, 2009).

5.2 Impacts at the community level

NTPPR policies and programmes that target poor communes have considerable potential to generate positive impacts at the community level, especially through infrastructure investments, increased community participation and enhanced social inclusion.

P135 II in particular can bring needed infrastructure to create a local environment that enables poor people to rise out of poverty. There is encouraging evidence that investments in roads and electricity have brought real benefits to people in recipient communes (see Box 8), including in the An Giang sites. Focus group participants highlighted that some households now have electricity, roads are greatly improved and there are also more accessible schools and health clinics. Similar benefits were not mentioned in Ha Giang, however.

Box 8: Infrastructure improvements

Over the past decade, the Vietnamese government has successfully connected 6.3 million households to the electricity grid, spending more than \$1.2 billion. Investments in roads have totalled \$2.6 billion, resulting in a situation in which fewer than 300 communes are without road access. A recent study found that improved access to roads in rural areas has had significant positive impacts with regard to the development of markets and commercialisation, especially in terms of availability of food goods. The study also attributed the switch from agricultural to non-agricultural, service-based economic activities among some households to the construction of roads. Finally, the roads were found to contribute to a higher primary school completion rate.

Source: Ren Mu and van de Walle (2007), cited in Joint Donor Group (2007).

Increased community participation is another important gain identified by male but especially female focus group discussants. Women are now attending community and women's associations meetings more often. This is partly because of women's greater economic participation:

'Women's lives are better because now they have jobs to do, feel more confident and participate in meetings more' (Female focus group, Soc Triet, 2009).

This is also arguably a result of greater access to credit:

'Many women before getting credit were very shy, but participating in credit groups and taking on rotational leadership improves their confidence a lot. It has even led to women taking positions in local government at the village level and within the Women's Union' (Deputy Director, VWU, 2009).

Some focus group discussants, however, cautioned that *'poor women at meetings rarely express their ideas as they are afraid of being wrong and think that others will expect too much'* (Female focus group, Soc Triet, 2009) and that women are participating more mainly because of the time of the meetings – during the day when men are out at work. If the meetings are in the evenings then men will participate instead.

Finally, the NTPPR is attributed with impacting community social relations. On the one hand, it is reported to have reduced violence and led to general improvements in welfare:

'Everything is better than before ... our living standards have improved and we are not as miserable as we used to be ... Life is much better than five years ago' (Female focus group, Chi Sang, 2009).

'We have less fear of being cheated at the market now as we speak some of the national language' (Male focus group, Pac Ngam, 2009).

On the other hand, there are still concerns that *'rich people look down on the poor ... the poor are blamed for having everything given to us by the government (e.g. Tet bonus, roofing for our houses)'* (Female focus group, Chi Sang, 2009). Preferential access to loans also seems to be a source of community tension:

'There is some jealousy among some of the non-poor as the poor have been given loans with low or no interest rates' (Female focus group, Pac Ngam, 2009).

'It is unfair: the poor can borrow constantly but the non-poor are unable to get a loan approved' (Female focus group, Soc Triet, 2009).

For others, communication barriers remain a significant challenge:

'We can get the medication, but we cannot understand what the doctor says; we can half understand and half not understand what agricultural extension staff says when they occasionally come to the village' (Male focus group, Chi Sang, 2009).

6. Drivers of programme impact

A number of politico-institutional and socio-cultural drivers have contributed to the mixed implementation record of the NTPPR, including its gender dimensions.

6.1 Politico-institutional drivers

While the design of the NTPPR seeks to address poverty in a holistic manner, achieving this in practice has proven more difficult, in large part because of coordination challenges. The programme's comprehensive approach is a double-edged sword: growing awareness of the multidimensionality of poverty calls for a multifaceted policy response like the one NTPPR envisions (Jones et al., 2009), but striking a balance between comprehensiveness and undue complexity has remained elusive. The programme is housed under MOLISA, but the inclusion of sectoral benefits within the programme requires close involvement of other line ministries, especially the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET), MOH, MPI, the Ministry of Justice and MARD, increasing the potential for fragmentation and overlap in implementation modalities (MOLISA/UNDP, 2009).

'There is not enough coordination between DOLISA and the Departments of Finance and Planning. The needs of the poor, from literacy to agricultural technology, are vast – it is hard to coordinate. It's really hard to get the results if each policy is to be implemented on its own, separately' (DOLISA Head of Social Protection Unit, Ha Giang, 2009).

'There are too many groups taking care of the same things – the state cannot keep track of it all – women's groups, farmer groups, etc. We also have a lot of social security programmes, poverty reduction programmes, as well as other policies, but they are not focusing enough. The less focus, the greater the overlap' (DOLISA official, An Giang, 2009).

Indeed, key informant interviews suggested that officials from line ministries, with the exception of MPI, are largely unfamiliar with NTPPR objectives and provisions. This is perhaps a reflection of the fact that the NTPPR is not a programme *per se*, but rather a collection of diverse instruments and mechanisms,⁴⁴ and has potentially undermined its effectiveness and has certainly hindered the evaluation process (ibid). The national government appears to be cognisant of this weakness and is in the process of establishing a steering committee to be led by the Deputy Prime Minister, who can ask ministers to act. Donors have also sent a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister requesting a meeting to discuss with the government how this next phase of poverty reduction programmes will be developed, including rethinking the poverty line. Coordination is always time consuming, however. There are also still few models of good practice that can be replicated, and knowledge translation efforts need to be accelerated (Senior Programme Manager, AusAID, 2009).

A related challenge concerns programme enforcement, monitoring and evaluation. Provincial-level staff emphasised that programme funding is generally inadequate and that there is a dearth of funds for effective monitoring and assessment. This is in line with the findings of the recent mid-term review of the NTPPR: 'Openness and transparency of information among sectors is still limited: information is only internally disseminated within the concerned sector, thus it is difficult for other sectors to share information for cooperation; concurrently it is very hard to carry out horizontal supervision and cross check' (N6 KIP, cited in MOLISA/UN Viet Nam, 2009).

44 According to the 2008 mid-term evaluation report, 'the NTP-PR design does not make it a programme ... It is still complex with components managed by multiple agencies ... which makes it difficult to see room for improvement' (UNDP et al., 2008).

In recognition of this weakness, a number of donors, including the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Finland, Irish Aid and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), are supporting the development of better reporting skills and the establishment of more robust monitoring and evaluation systems. AusAID is also partnering with the government in an annual audit programme to strengthen national to local communication channels in order to improve programme transparency and accountability.

In light of the food security challenges discussed in section 3, an additional challenge facing social protection efforts is the relative institutional invisibility of food insecurity issues. While the NTPPR's predecessor, the Hunger Eradication and Poverty Reduction Programme, explicitly identified the elimination of hunger eradication as a goal, this dimension is largely absent in discussions about the NTPPR, whether in the mid-term review report or in key informant interviews. In part, this appears to be because for the large majority of Vietnamese households, hunger is not an issue, and thus policy makers in line ministries are focused instead on human capital and infrastructure improvements. This approach does however overlook the pockets of high malnutrition among some ethnic minority communities, and the ongoing need for food security vulnerabilities to be included in the design of future social protection strategies.

The above-mentioned general institutional weaknesses appear to be exacerbated in the case of efforts to mainstream gender into poverty reduction and social protection policies and programming. Key informant interviews suggested that gender-sensitive policies and programmes are hindered by limited gender-disaggregated data; lack of practical training on gender mainstreaming; inadequate or insufficient accountability mechanisms (especially binding executive decrees); and under-recognition of the potential for gender equality to contribute to the realisation of developmental and poverty reduction goals.

First, although gender statistics are being collected to some degree,⁴⁵ their reporting is very weak and not integrated into regular analysis and reporting processes. Neither the Ministry of Education nor MOLISA was able provide gender-disaggregated data on credit provided for education and vocational training to poor households, for example (Head of Department of Finance and Planning, MOET, 2009); similarly, MARD's five- and 10-year strategies lack gender-disaggregated data and gender impact analysis (Gender Advisor, Oxfam QB, 2009).

There are also some concerns about data quality, adequacy and timeliness. MPI officials complained that GSO data are not necessarily reliable and thus it is difficult to request data on the impacts of programmes on male and female beneficiaries. Moreover, survey data are often released too late to be included in annual development plans and MPI is therefore compelled to rely on administrative reports from its provincial-level departments. However, *'even when we request local government officials to collect data on men and women, they don't respond – so there simply aren't any beneficiary data at the national level'* (Head of Department of Labour, Cultural and Social Affairs, MPI, 2009). Data are also missing on some important areas such as the informal sector, migrant workers and time poverty – in all of which women are believed to be especially vulnerable (UN Gender Advisor, 2009). It has also been very difficult to get gender indicators accepted. For instance, in the case of a recent provincial-level workshop on the gender dimensions of P135, there were just 10 men out of 300 attendees, reflecting that gender-sensitive programming is not a priority (Programme Officer, Poverty and Social Development Cluster, UNDP, 2009).

Training is another area consistently identified by key informants as requiring urgent attention. *'We don't have experts but staff whose responsibilities are not clearly assigned and trained on'* (DOLISA Head of Social Protection Unit, Ha Giang, 2009). Gender training has been provided

45 In 2009 the World Bank undertook an analysis of existing gender indicators in line with the 2007 Gender Equality Law's provisions for better gender-disaggregated data and found relatively extensive indicators, but poor use, and is thus planning to support efforts to strengthen the utilisation of such data by MOLISA, GSO and MPI in particular.

quite widely, but there are major problems with quality, relating to limited budget, language barriers for ethnic minority populations and insufficient practical guidance. Programme beneficiaries are often illiterate and commune leaders often have low levels of education, so there is a need for more visual and audio materials for training purposes, including in ethnic minority languages. Language is a particular issue for ethnic minority women: although women frequently perform the main agricultural activities in such communities, men go to training sessions, as extension workers mainly use the Kinh language. Some efforts are being made to find bilingual workers, but ensuring that they also have adequate gender awareness is especially challenging (Programme Officer, Poverty and Social Development Cluster, UNDP, 2009). There are also broader concerns that the training provided, especially at the Commune People's Council and People's Committee levels, is very basic, activity based and not strategic, with no follow-up or monitoring and evaluation. Indeed, for many officials there is a sense that training is perceived as '*just another task*' or '*an extra burden*' (Gender Advisor, Oxfam QB, 2009).

A third institutional shortcoming emphasised is the inadequacy of the gender focal point system. Focal points are usually untrained and relatively junior, with little decision-making power. They lack a dedicated budget and are thus often overstretched (Country Programme Manager, UNIFEM, 2009). Although MOLISA has a Department of Gender Equality, representatives were not present in the consultation on social protection, explaining in part the weak integration of gender in the draft national strategy (Gender Focal Point, UNDP, 2009). They were also unable to provide technical support on a legislative review supported by the Gender Equality Fund (Country Programme Manager, UNIFEM, 2009). As such, while governmental key informants are frequently able to recognise that men and women experience poverty and economic crises differently, this knowledge is not reflected in policy and programme design and planning. There appears to be a widespread concern that, despite attendance at gender mainstreaming workshops, few officials know how to integrate gender into their everyday working lives. Practical, tailored guidance is lacking, without which little progress in advancing gender-sensitive programming can be expected.

'It is critical to have detailed guidelines for each ministry – not just generic gender training, which we have again and again' (Head of Department of Labour, Cultural and Social Affairs, MPI, 2009).

'There's no one tell us how to integrate gender targets now' (DOLISA Head of Social Protection Unit, Ha Giang, 2009).

In order to overcome this, decisive leadership at a senior level is required: gender reporting needs to be institutionalised through government decrees, whereby lower-level bureaucrats are mandated to report and will therefore be more likely to seek out the requisite training and support needed to integrate gender issues into their work.

'Currently they don't respond, so they need to be forced to do so if we want real change' (Head of Department of Labour, Cultural and Social Affairs, MPI, 2009).

As challenging as the mainstreaming process is, there are some encouraging developments. At the national level, the National Assembly's Social Affairs Committee (SAC) is taking a proactive stance vis-à-vis gender issues and helping to elevate visibility around key gender-related legislation (Box 9). Donors are also increasingly requesting that gender considerations be included in programme assessments, and this is leading to demand for better indicators (Deputy Chairperson, VWU, 2009). AusAID, Finland, UNDP and UNIFEM are also supporting a training of trainers programme at provincial level, which appears to be having a positive impact so far (Senior Programme Manager, Governance, AusAID, 2009). At local level, a number of key informants concurred that women are gradually enjoying more voice at community level, which is helping to promote more gender-sensitive implementation procedures (especially organising meetings and trainings at times that women can manage alongside their care work and domestic responsibilities). Lastly, the VWU is undertaking a range of awareness-raising efforts around both the Gender Equality Law and the Domestic Violence Law, so that members can develop a better

understanding of their rights. This is being undertaken in conjunction with the Ministry of Justice and appears to be a positive example of partnership (Deputy Chairperson, VWU, 2009).

Box 9: Championing gender: The National Assembly's SAC

Over the past five years, the National Assembly has become increasingly active in Vietnamese politics, and the SAC is no exception. Although it still needs to build up its own gender expertise, it has forged strong links with the government-affiliated IFGS, UNDP and other research organisations, providing a useful platform for researchers to disseminate findings and promote the use of research in policy planning. Importantly, the SAC can ask government agencies to report on policy implementation and has been empowered to request the inclusion of sex-disaggregated data in such reports according to the 2007 Gender Equality Law, Item 5, Article 25 and the May 2009 Decree 48, which provides more detail to key line ministries on this provision. The SAC sees this as a positive development but notes a continued lack of enforcement power and emphasises that more is needed from senior decision makers. For instance, a recent document by the PM on the NTPPR makes no mention of men or women and uses only gender-neutral terminology – ‘poor people’. SAC argues that calling for information on gender impacts at a senior level would send a powerful message about the importance of tackling gender inequalities as part of broader poverty reduction efforts.

Source: Director, Department for Social Affairs, SAC (2009).

6.2 Socio-cultural drivers

A number of socio-cultural factors also contribute to the difficulties in promoting gender-sensitive poverty reduction programming. First, community attitudes towards state-provided poverty reduction efforts are often complex and demand skilful negotiation. Given Viet Nam's socialist ethos, a high premium is typically attached to ensuring that programmes benefit all equally, but this does not always result in the most effective poverty reduction solutions. For instance, a 2008 evaluation of the HEPR programme found that, rather than investing block grants in productive activities, villagers frequently opted to invest funds in building a communal house based on the perception that all would benefit equally (Researcher, Department of Rural Sociology, Institute of Sociology, 2009). Part of the problem is that communities are being allowed to make decisions but with only partial knowledge about investment options and their likely impacts (ibid). In other cases, some highland ethnic minority groups have ‘a cultural view of the state whereby they are reluctant to participate in activities belonging to the state – whether or not it feeds their needs. The state belongs to the other and so people tend to look within the community first’ (Deputy Head, Programme 135, CEMA, 2009). Accordingly, there is need for programme implementers to build up communities’ understanding of the state and of citizenship rights; programme staff need support in developing the appropriate soft skills for such a role.

Second, language and cultural diversity have not been adequately factored into programme design in many cases. Especially in ethnic minority communities, women in particular are often unaware of programme provisions owing to language barriers. Language hurdles can also be compounded by cultural gender roles and gendered education and literacy gaps, so that women are less likely to contribute to community discussions (Chair, VWU, Lao Va Chai, 2009) and/or are prevented from attending meetings on account of time poverty. For instance, ‘*Hmong women wake at 3am and spend the day working. They have no time to go to class*’ (ibid). Some programmes have not factored in cultural taboos adequately so as to ensure equal access. As one official pointed out:

‘Many minority women are very private about their bodies and hesitant to go to centres for delivery and birth control. The department now sends trained women to them to do check-ups and treatment’ (Department of Health Officials, Ha Giang, 2009).

Cultural attitudes are also proving to be a challenge in the implementation of the new Domestic Violence Law.

‘People are very confused as typically Vietnamese pride themselves on having a non-conflictual family culture. The police and courts are very confused too and don’t have enough practical guidance on how

to deal with such tensions. The new law conflicts with customary law too (Women's Rights Coordinator, ActionAid, 2009).

Lastly, Viet Nam's limited civil society activity, especially in the case of recent social protection initiatives, has meant that any watchdog function in terms of programme oversight has been weak. While Viet Nam's civil society is relatively underdeveloped, this has arguably been exacerbated by the July 2009 Decree 97, which required that all local NGOs register with the Prime Minister's office and comply with a list of activities on which NGOs can 'legitimately work'. This list excludes issues related to human rights, gender, minority rights and access to information, meaning that there is limited scope for NGOs to champion greater accountability in resource distribution, social justice and programme implementation. Moreover, even the government-affiliated mass organisation, the VWU, lamented that it lacked information on the NTPPR mid-term evaluation process and did not receive an invite to be part of the consultation process. While more INGOs are active on such issues, it is not easy to promote greater civil society activity for the time being. It is also worth noting that the INGO Resource Centre, a coordinating body for INGOs in the country which facilitates a number of thematic working groups on various policy issues, lacks groups on issues relevant to gender-sensitive social protection such as gender, poverty, human rights, social protection, health or agriculture (Managing Co-Director, NGO Resource Centre, 2009).

7. Conclusions and policy implications

Multi-pronged social protection initiatives are increasingly recognised as a critical tool to address a range of gendered economic and social vulnerabilities. Overall, our analysis has found that Viet Nam's NTPPR has made a useful contribution towards addressing a number of women's practical gender needs, especially reducing the costs associated with accessing basic health and education services for their families and themselves, and in some communities improving food security and housing quality. It has also made a limited contribution to enhancing women's access to microcredit, which in some cases has had valuable spill-over effects on intra-household gender power relations. At the community level, there have been important infrastructure improvements as well as an increase in women's community participation, although this has been uneven and relatively limited, especially among ethnic minority populations, where language remains a significant barrier to equal programme access. Meanwhile, our findings suggest that a number of programme design features, as well as implementation practices, should be improved as the NTPPR enters a new phase, in order to improve overall programme effectiveness and fully harness the programme's transformatory potential.

7.1 Policy and programme design

Integrating gender issues into policy and programme design entails strengthening attention to gender dynamics at the household and community levels, as well as ensuring that gender-sensitive mechanisms are embedded within programme governance structures.

At the household and community levels, there is an urgent need to ensure that programme benefits are informed by an evidence-based understanding of the differential needs of men and women, boys and girls, in both male- and female-headed households, as well as the ways in which gender differences intersect with ethnicity in ethnic minority communities. This will be important whether the benefit is focused on household social assistance (e.g. fee exemptions and microcredit) or on community development (e.g. new infrastructure). Moreover, although important inroads have been made in terms of tackling food insecurity, highland populations still remain vulnerable as evidenced by high levels of nutritional disparities, and social protection policies and programmes should therefore ensure that food security and agricultural productivity remain core objectives of poverty reduction approaches. It is also critical that the mid-term evaluation of the NTPPR be complemented by a national-level assessment of the gendered impacts of the programme to date, so that effective lessons can be drawn and capitalised on as the programme's parameters and also those of the 2011-2015 SEDP are rethought for the next phase. The 2007 Gender Equality Law and the 2009 Decree 48 provide the requisite framework but, as we emphasise further below, expert technical support as well as senior-level commitment will be critical to realising their potential.

7.2 Implementation issues

Gender-sensitive programme design is a critical first step, but effective implementation requires strong political will and adequate investment in both human and financial capital in order to realise the potential of innovative programme design features. First, now that a thorough mapping of existing gender data and indicators has been carried out, it is imperative that senior government decision makers, National Assembly committees, civil society organisations as well as the donor community consistently demand that gender-disaggregated data be used in poverty reduction and social protection programme reporting. This cannot be seen as an optional extra but rather needs to be viewed as an integral part of addressing key vulnerabilities in impoverished communities.

Given that, for many officials, both at national and especially at local levels, gender-sensitive analysis is still new and challenging, a meaningful budget commitment needs to be made to help support this process, preferably through hands-on mentoring by gender experts. Generic training workshops have clearly failed to deliver the necessary capacities and thus a considerably more tailored, practical and ongoing approach is required if real change is to be achieved. A useful model that could perhaps be adapted is that of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's (Sida's) gender helpdesk approach, whereby a pool of gender experts is hired to be on call and questions/requests for help are fielded to them through a central coordinating mechanism.

Finally, while one of the key strengths of the NTPPR is its multi-pronged approach towards addressing economic and social vulnerabilities, to date this has come at the cost of administrative simplicity. Thus, it will also be important to identify a lead agency to take responsibility for ensuring that gender is adequately integrated across all programme components, in such a way as to promote synergies. In light of the diversity of vulnerability experiences in the country, a decentralised tailored approach is likely to be most effective, but again this will require a major investment in strengthening the capacities and gender sensitivity of local officials and programme implementers. It will also necessitate more concerted efforts to raise the awareness of poor women and men about programme benefits, not only at the household level but also in terms of the effective use of community block grants.

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Annex 1: Key social protection programmes in Viet Nam

Type of social protection (including amount of transfer/waiver)	Programme information: title; timeframe; administrative arrangements (who coordinates, who funds, who delivers)	Programme design (whether gender inequality is considered in the design in general and/or whether it addresses any gender-specific risks and vulnerability)	Programme linkages (does the programme link beneficiaries to other programmes or services? E.g. health, education, credit, skills training etc)	Programme objectives (including any gender-specific objectives)	Targeting/ eligibility (who is targeted and how is targeting done)	Coverage (how many households or beneficiaries – disaggregated by sex if possible)	Results/ outcomes (results of impact evaluations – at community, household and intra-household level)
Social assistance (protection and productivity enhancing measures)							
Agricultural extension and technology transfer and training to poor persons.	NTPPR 2006-2010 National Steering Committee headed by a Vice Prime-Minister. MOLISA the main coordinator in collaboration with other line ministries: MOH, MOET, MPI, MOF. Local governments are deliverers. This is a government-funded programme with VND 3500 billion from central government	The programme explicitly emphasises poor women-headed households as one of the target groups. However, the programme document does not mention other gender issues.	Beneficiaries from mountainous and ethnic minority extremely difficult communes also have P135 II (2006-2010) which focuses on basic communal infrastructure like roads, schools, health care stations, electricity transformation stations and local production support.	The overall objective is to speed up poverty reduction, improve quality of life of the poor and narrow the gap between rich and poor.	Official criteria based on monthly income per person for 2006-2010 (\$12-14 for rural and urban). In practice, decision above or below this is made through a combination of a survey and community discussion.	4.2 million poor persons. No sex-disaggregated data.	As of 2008 reached 43,6% of the target. Limited budget allocation – only 10% in the first two years. About 10% of poor persons do not benefit owing to complicated and time-consuming identification procedures.
Lower/exemption of vocational education fee for poor persons.	NTPPR MOLISA is in charge of this scheme	Lower/exemption of vocational education fee for poor persons.					
Lower/exemption of school fee and school building contributions for poor pupils.	NTPPR MOET is responsible for exemption and reduction of education fee.	Lower/exemption of school fee and school building contributions for poor pupils.					
Capacity building for poverty alleviation staff, out of whom 90% are at local level.	NTPPR MOLISA is responsible for this component.						

Type of social protection (including amount of transfer/waiver)	Programme information: title; timeframe; administrative arrangements (who coordinates, who funds, who delivers)	Programme design (whether gender inequality is considered in the design in general and/or whether it addresses any gender-specific risks and vulnerability)	Programme linkages (does the programme link beneficiaries to other programmes or services? E.g. health, education, credit, skills training etc)	Programme objectives (including any gender-specific objectives)	Targeting/ eligibility (who is targeted and how is targeting done)	Coverage (how many households or beneficiaries – disaggregated by sex if possible)	Results/ outcomes (results of impact evaluations – at community, household and intra-household level)
Cash transfer for vulnerable groups: isolated elderly, poor disabled, orphaned children and war invalids.	Social Guarantee Fund MOLISA is in charge of this scheme.						
Social insurance							
Health insurance cards for 100% of poor persons with exemption or lower fee for health care services.	NTPPR MOH is responsible for providing free health insurance cards to poor households.						
Free health insurance for children under six (since 2005)	Implementing government decree of July 2005 CPFC is in charge at central level, now transferred to MOLISA. Local governments are responsible for registration and allocation of the cards. Health care facilities are the implementers.				Children under 6 years of age.	All children under 6.	
Social equity and socially transformative measures (addressing issues of social equity and exclusion)							
Free legal support to 98% of poor persons in need.	NTPPR						Reached 58,7% of those in need, who account for 7.7% of the poor.

Gendered Risks, Poverty and Vulnerability in Viet Nam

Type of social protection (including amount of transfer/waiver)	Programme information: title; timeframe; administrative arrangements (who coordinates, who funds, who delivers)	Programme design (whether gender inequality is considered in the design in general and/or whether it addresses any gender-specific risks and vulnerability)	Programme linkages (does the programme link beneficiaries to other programmes or services? E.g. health, education, credit, skills training etc)	Programme objectives (including any gender-specific objectives)	Targeting/ eligibility (who is targeted and how is targeting done)	Coverage (how many households or beneficiaries – disaggregated by sex if possible)	Results/ outcomes (results of impact evaluations – at community, household and intra-household level)
Other relevant programmes							
Preferential credit through Vietnam Bank for Social Policy to poor households and poor students. This is the largest component (60% of resources).	NTPPR					To 6 million poor households and credit for poor students.	Reached 46.4% of target. But credit volume for a poor household is too limited – cannot help it effectively get out of poverty.
Support for slum eradication to 500,000 poor households							
Support to build basic infrastructure in communes facing with hardship in ethnic minority and mountainous areas. Help poor communes in ethnic minority areas in improving housing and land holdings and water sources.	SEDP for extremely difficult communes in ethnic minority and mountainous areas - P135 II – 2006-2010, P134 and P132 CEMA is the coordinator at the central level, with participation of MARD, MOLISA, MPI, MOFA. Local government is the implementer.	The documents of both programmes do not mention gender issues. The programme addresses risks and vulnerability at commune but not individual level.	Target communes also benefit from the NTPPR. E.g. poor households have access to preferential credit and education fee exemptions.	Promote the agricultural production and sector restructuring towards the market. Narrow the gaps between areas and ethnic groups. Improve the welfare of local people in the area. Reduce the rate of poverty to 30% to 2010.	Communes and villages facing hardship in ethnic minority and mountainous areas. Based on official criteria including geo-economic characteristics and lack of or poor situation of 5 basic infrastructure items, such as schools, health centres, electricity lines and roads.	1946 communes and 3149 villages.	End-2008: built/improved 380,000 houses and allocated 1500 ha of residential plots to 72,000 households and 30,000 ha of agricultural land to 85,500 households. 200,000 poor households are supported with clean water No information on individual/ intra-household results/impacts.

Annex 2: Research instruments

Life history questions

Key information

Aims:

- To explore in-depth individuals' gendered experiences of risk and vulnerability, and the individual, household, community and policy-level factors which shape available coping/resilience strategies
- To gain an understanding of the relative importance of the focus social protection programme intervention in diverse individuals' lives

Scope:

- Eight life histories among participants per sub-national district for the following life stages:
 - Adolescent (m and f)
 - Married (m and f)
 - Single-headed hh (m and f)
 - Aged (m and f)

Data collection and other issues:

- Gift
- Recorded, transcribed and English verbatim translation
- Field notes on interview dynamics
- Interview to last between 60 and 90 minutes

Useful resources:

- 'Report on CPRC workshop: Panel Surveys and Life History Methods'. See especially page 8 (Figure 2, Life History Diagram, Bangladesh)

Life history interview questions for adolescents (male and female)

Introductions

- Basic background information (name, age, place of birth, living arrangements, etc)
- Explain the objectives of this study and the format of the interview

General (optional depending on judgment of lead qualitative researcher in country team)

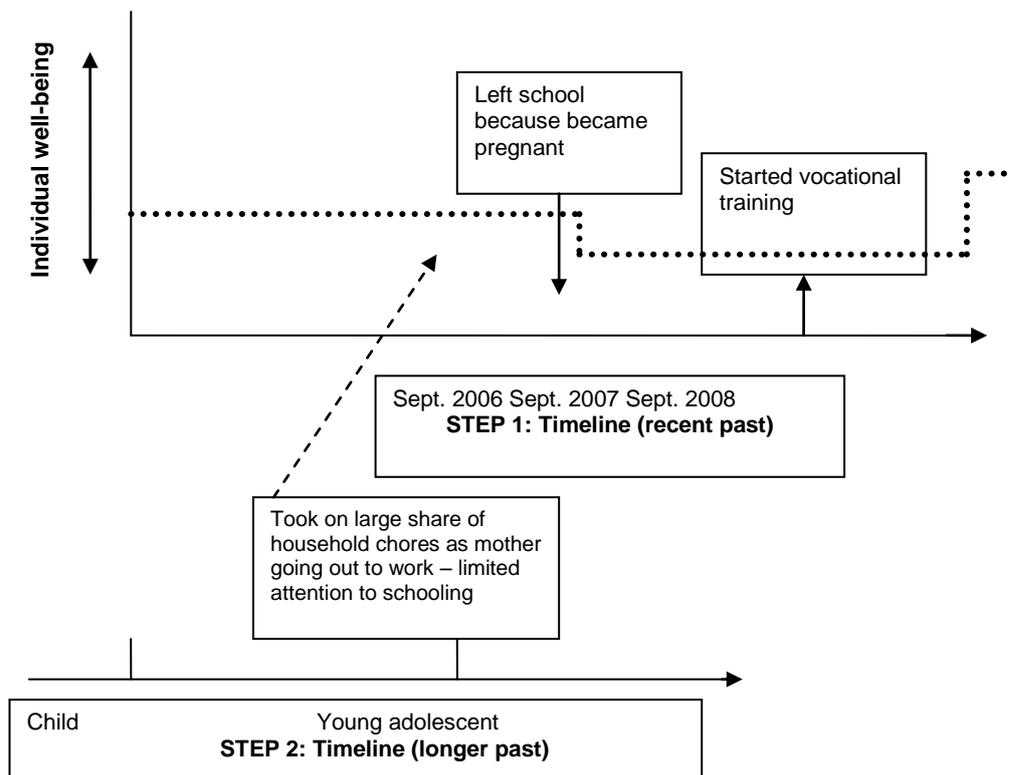
- What are some of the key challenges that girls/boys [choose the same sex as your interviewee] of your age in this village face? E.g. at the following levels:
 - Individual level (e.g. lack of schooling, health-related problems, hunger, violence, teenage pregnancy)
 - Household level (e.g. lack of decision making in the household; unequal allocation of time doing tasks in and out of the household between siblings; unequal distribution of food)
 - Community (lack of participation in community decision making, lack of provision of basic services; lack of opportunities for young people; significant generational differences between old and young)
- Have they always faced these challenges?
- How do people tend to cope with these challenges? E.g.
 - Borrow money (from relatives, friends, micro-finance institutions)
 - Work in paid employment

- Make different family arrangements (e.g. living with different family members)

Individual recent past

- Can you tell us about your life over the last two or three years?
- Has anything gone particularly well during this period? What have been the positive changes? Who and what was responsible?
- What particular challenges have you faced over the past two/three years?
- Can you explain why you think you face these challenges?
- Have you/your family tried to overcome these challenges? What strategies have you used? How well have these strategies worked?
- Have other families in the village also used these strategies to overcome similar challenges?
- How do you think your options/strategies have been similar or different from girls/boys (opposite sex to interviewee) of the same age?
- Have you been involved in any government or non-government programmes/activities that have helped you overcome these challenges?
- Has the LEAP provided specific support to overcoming these challenges? If no – why not? If yes - in what way?

Interviewer draws key events on a timeline over the past two/three years in order to summarise content (STEP 1 in diagram below).



Longer past

Interviewer uses a longer visual timeline to prompt the discussion around the longer past (e.g. interviewer draws a longer timeline underneath the one above (shorter timeline) and draw arrows between the two to show connections) (STEP 2 in diagram above).

- Thinking back to when you were younger, can you map out **key events** in your life up until now (positive and negative) that have influenced the type of choices you have made or the alternatives you've had? Why have these been important?
 - At individual level (e.g. schooling, health)
 - Household level (e.g. livelihood opportunities; available household resources; decisions in the household to spend on schooling, health, income generating; changes in the family (birth, death, marriage, divorce etc));
 - Community level (e.g. discrimination/exclusion from community activities or resources; exclusion from participating in community decision making, violence)
- How has the way you and/or your family lived life until now influenced the way you deal with the challenges you identified before?
- Do you ever think that if you had made a different choice before, your life would be different now? What would you have done differently?

Future plans

- Given your present circumstances what are you planning to do in the short term? What are your longer term plans?
- How do you think your options are similar or different from someone from the opposite sex of the same age?
- To what extent can the LEAP help you achieve your short term and long term plans?
- How would you change the social protection programme to better meet your needs?
- Is your view the same as others in the household or do different members have different opinions?

Life history questions for married/single/aged (male and female)

Introductions

- Basic background information (name, age, place of birth, living arrangements etc).
- Explain the objectives of this study and the format of the interview

General

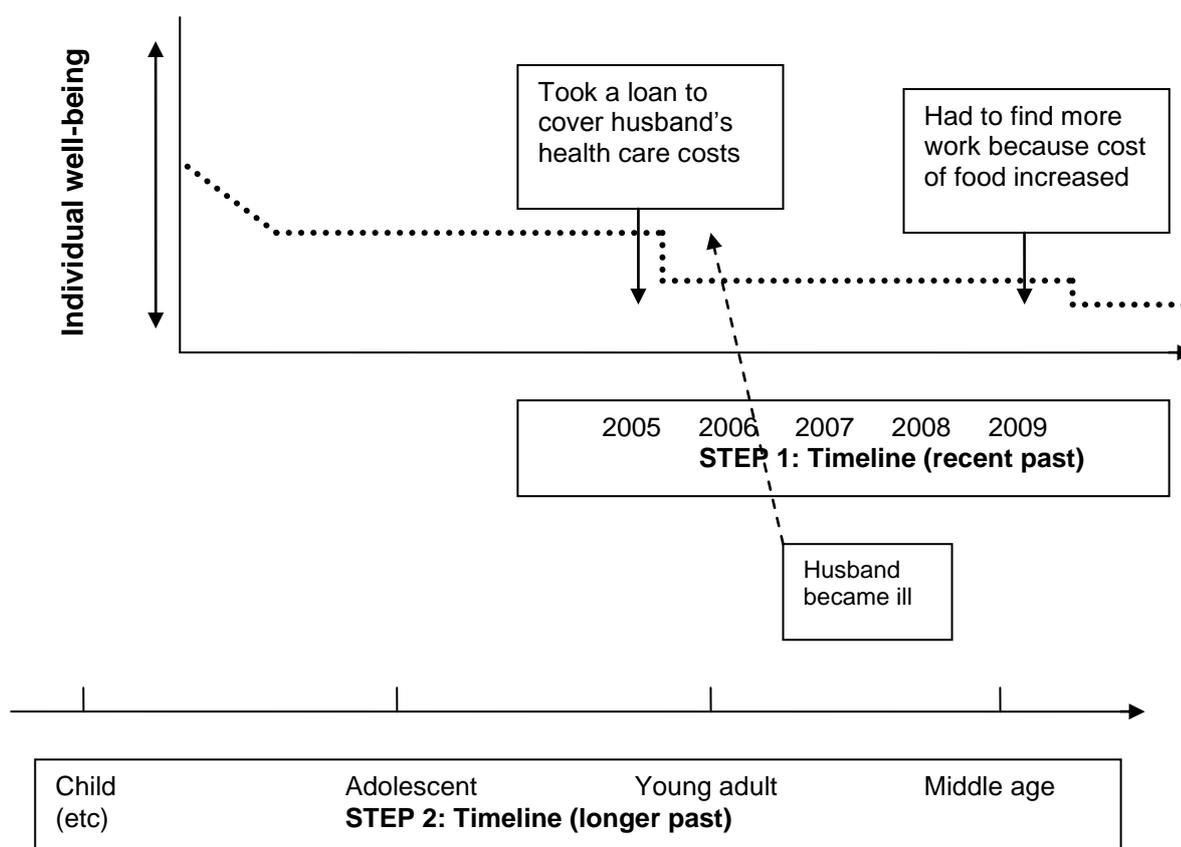
- What are the some of key challenges that women/men [choose the same sex as your interviewee] your age in this village face?
 - Individual level (e.g. lack of schooling, health-related problems, food insecurity, violence, lack of ownership of assets (e.g. land, livestock, housing)
 - Household level (e.g. lack of decision making in the household over household expenditure e.g. on productive activities, on health and education, on food; unequal allocation of time e.g. in domestic and care responsibilities and income generating activities; unequal distribution of food in the household)
 - Community (lack of participation in community decision making, lack of provision of basic services)
- Have they always faced these challenges?
- How do people tend to cope with these challenges?

Individual recent past

- Can you tell us about your life over the last two or three years?
- Has anything gone particularly well during this period? What have been the positive changes? Who and what was responsible?
- What particular challenges have you faced over the last five years?
- Can you explain why you think you face these challenges?
- Have you tried to overcome these challenges? What strategies have you used? How well have these strategies worked?
- Have other families in the village also used these strategies to overcome similar challenges?

- How do you think your options / strategies have been similar or different from women / men [choose opposite sex to interviewee] of the same age?
- Have you participated in any government or non-government programmes/activities that have helped you overcome these challenges?
- Has the LEAP provided specific support to overcoming these challenges? If no – why not? If yes - in what way?
- Over these last five years has anything gone particularly well? What have been the positive changes? Who and what was responsible?

Interviewer draws key events on a timeline over the last five years in order to summarise content. STEP 1 in diagram below.



Past

Interviewer uses the visual timeline to prompt the discussion around the longer past (e.g. interviewer draws a longer timeline underneath the one above (shorter timeline) and draw arrows between the two to show connections). STEP 2 in diagram above.

- Thinking back to when you were younger, can you map out key events in your life up until now (positive and negative) that have influenced the type of choices you have made or the alternatives you've had?
 - At individual level (e.g. schooling, health)
 - Household level (e.g. livelihood opportunities; available household resources; decisions in the household to spend on schooling, health, income generating; changes in the family (birth, death, marriage, divorce etc));
 - Community level (e.g. discrimination/exclusion from community activities or resources; exclusion from participating in community decision making)

- How has the way you have lived your life until now influenced the way you deal with the challenges you identified before?
- Do you ever think that if you had made a different choice before, your life would be different now? What would you have done differently?

Future plans

- Given your present circumstances what are you planning to do in the short term? What are your longer term plans?
- How do you think your options are similar or different from someone from the opposite sex at the same life stage?
- To what extent can the social protection programme help you achieve your short term and long term plans?
- How would you change the social protection programme to better meet your needs?
- Is your view the same as others in the household or do different members have different opinions?

Focus group discussions

Key information

Aims:

- To understand the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the focus social protection intervention
- To understand the strengths and weaknesses of the focus social protection intervention in terms of shaping community experiences of inclusion/ exclusion and/or discrimination

Scope:

- 4 FGDs (2 men, 2 women) per sub-national unit with programme participants

Data collection required:

- Maximum 75 minutes
- Provision of snacks
- One person leading
- One person recording identity of participants and the sequence in which they speak
- One translator for ODI team
- Detailed notes from discussion around the four questions including areas of debate among participants and dominant opinion among participants for each question
- Observation of group dynamics

Useful resources:

- Slater, R. and Mphale, M. (2008) Cash transfers, gender and generational relations: evidence from a pilot project in Lesotho. See especially Annex 2.

Focus group discussion: Key questions/themes and suggestions for prompts

- 1. What have been the direct impacts of the social protection programme on the household?**
 - Improving economic security
 - Improving food consumption (quality and quantity)
 - Helping to provide better protection and care for household members
 - Improving household human capital
 - Providing adequate protection from the impacts of shocks (e.g. community and idiosyncratic shocks)
- 2. What have been the indirect impacts of the social protection programme on the household?**
 - Has participation in the programme influenced power relations between men and women? Between generations? How and why?
 - Has participation in the programme influenced access to social capital (formal and informal)?
 - What impact does the programme have on child well-being?
 - Impact on access to credit services
 - Reduce impact of seasonality
- 3. What have been the direct impacts of the social protection programme on the community?**
 - Increased access to/utilisation/accumulation of community assets – for whom?
 - Increased utilisation of social services

4. What have been the indirect impacts of the programme on the community?

- Better quality basic social service
- Increased civil society agency to demand entitlements – representing which types of groups?
- Increased government responsiveness to citizen demands
- Reduced exclusion of marginalised social groups
- Negative impact on community E.g. exacerbating existing community tensions
- Tensions between women in different social groups

N.B. For analysis, refer back to conceptual framework levels: individual, household and community

Household survey on gender and social protection (Viet Nam)

Instructions

- 1) This questionnaire should be answered by NTPPR participants who are on the list of the poor and are either:
 - a) Female heads of household or
 - b) Adult women or men who are either the household head or the partner of the household head.

Please ensure proportion of respondents from categories in a) and b) is proportionate to the proportion of female headed households who are programme beneficiaries in your woreda

- 2) How should households be selected? Based on the list of the poor of the two villages, 25 households per village.
- 3) How much time? We envisage approximately 1 hour per survey (max 1.5 hours) and that one researcher can complete 5 surveys per day.
- 4) Use the surveys to help you select the life history case studies – all life histories should be a member of a household who was surveyed.
- 5) Financial incentive structure per household provided.

A. BASIC HOUSEHOLD PROFILE (defined by: sleep under the same roof/compound and eat from the same kitchen)

1. Name of the respondent _____
 - 1.1 Position of the respondent in the household (1= head; 2= wife/husband, 3= son, 4= daughter; 5=Other- specify)
 - 1.2 Sex of the respondent (1= Male; 2= Female)
2. Name of location
 - 2.1 Province = _____; 2.2 District = _____;
 - 2.3 Commune = _____; 2.4. Village = _____
3. How long have you lived in this community?
 1. 01 = less than one year
 2. 02 = between one and five years
 3. 03 = more than five years
4. Are you a member of the NTPPR?
 - 1= Yes; 2= No
5. Name of head of household _____
 - 5.1 Sex of the household head _____ (1=Male; 2=Female)

6. Household roster: For all household members please fill out this table:

Member id	Name of the household member	Sex 01=M 02=F	Age in completed years	Marital status (see code 1)	Highest education level achieved (see code 2)	Religion (see code 3)	What does each household member do? (list up to 3 activities in order of how much time is spent) (Use code 4)		
							Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3
1									
2									
3									

4									
5									
6									
7									
8									
9									
10									

Code 1: Marital status: 01=single; 02=married; 03=divorced/ separated; 04=widowed; 05=cohabitation; 06=polygamous relationship (record number of wife).

Code 2: Education level Grade 1-12 (enter number 01-12 as appropriate); 13=Tertiary education; 14=vocational training; 15=religious education; 16=adult literacy; 17=illiterate.

Code 3: Religion: 02 – Muslim; 03- no religion ; 04 – protestant; 06- Catholic; 07-Hindu; 09-Buddhist; 10- Other (state); 99 Children/not applicable.

Code 4: Activity

Agriculture	Non-agriculture	Unemployed or unpaid
01 – self-employed (food)	08 – self-employed (manufacturing)	15 – unemployed
02 – self-employed (non-food/cash crop)	09 – self-employed (business)	16 – household chores
03 – aquaculture	10 – self-employed (services)	17 – care of household dependent (sick, disabled, child, elderly)
04- livestock	11 – wage employment	18 – begging
05 – wage employment	12- regular waged employment	19 – schooling
06 – other (specify)	13 – other (specify)	20- play
		21- unpaid herding
		22 – other (specify)
23 – public works programme		

7. Does your household own land? _____ 1= yes; 2= No. If no, skip to Q9.

8. If yes, please fill the following table about the size and type of land

	Type of land	Size of land in hectares
1	Own cultivated land	
2	Rented in land	
3	Rented out land sharecropped in land	
4	Share cropped out land	
6	Share cropped in land	
6	Other type of land (specify)	

9. Household assets (see code 5 on next page):

- i) Livestock _____
- ii) Equipment (e.g. farming) _____
- iii) Transport _____
- iv) Communication tools _____
- v) Toilet type _____
- vi) Drinking water _____
- vii) Number of rooms in house _____
- viii) Savings (in bank, credit group) _____
 - i. If yes, how much have you saved in Birr? _____
- ix) Do you have loans? -----
 - i. What is the value of these loans? _____
- x) Other _____

Code 5

Livestock – yes/no and how many of each?	Equipment	Transport	Communication tools	Toilet type	Drinking water	No. of rooms in house	Savings	Loans – Yes/no. If yes, can you make payments?
01= poultry	01= kerosene stove	01= working bicycle	01= working mobile phone	01= forest/field/open place	01 bore well	01=1 room	01= yes	01=yes and can make payments
02=sheep	02=water pump	02= animal and cart	02= working landline phone	02 neighbour/relative – latrine	02 bought water	02=2 rooms	02= no	02=yes but can't make payments
03=cows	03=plough	03= horses	03=radio	03 own pit latrine	03 piped into dwelling	03=3 rooms		03=no
04=oxen	04=other (specify)		04=TV	04 none	04 piped into neighbour or relative dwelling	04= 4 or more rooms		
05= mules					06 public standpipe or tubewell			
06= fish	06= water pump				07 protected well			
07= goats	07= other, specify				08 unprotected well			
08 = other, specify								
09= don't have								

Code for number of Livestock: 01.35 = 35 poultry; 02.02= 2 pigs.

10. Do you own the house you live in? (1=yes; 2=no)
If no skip to question 14.

11. If yes, materials from which WALL of the house is made
 1= Brick/concrete/stone
 2= Adobe/mud
 3= Wood/branches
 4= Galvanized iron
 5= Matting
 6= Other: SPECIFY _____

12. Materials from which the ROOF is made
 1=- Straw/thatch
 2=-Earth/mud
 3=- Wood/planks
 4=- Galvanised iron
 5=- Concrete/ cement
 6=- Tiles/slates
 7=-Other: SPECIFY @_____

13. Materials from which the FLOOR is made
 1=- Earth
 2=- Wood
 3=- Stone/brick

- 4=- Cement/tile
- 5=- Laminated material
- 6=- Other: SPECIFY @ _____

14. What is the main type of fuel you usually use for cooking?

- 1= Wood
- 2= Kerosene/paraffin
- 3= Charcoal
- 4= Gas/electricity
- 5= Cow dung
- 6= None
- 7= Other: SPECIFY _____

15. What is the main type of energy source you usually use for lighting

- 1= Wood
- 2= Kerosene/paraffin
- 3= Candle
- 4= Gas
- 5= Electricity
- 7= None
- 8= Other: SPECIFY _____

Social capital:

16. To what kind of groups do members of your household belong? (fill 1= if yes; 2= if no in each box) Take member id from Q6

Member id (from Q6)	Religious org	Savings/ credit group	Trade org	Women's association	Youth association	Peasants association	Labour union	Self-help group	Other – please specify	Not participate in any
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										
11										
12										

17. Who can you rely on for support (financial, personal, in-kind) in hard times? (1 = yes ; 2= 0)

Member id (from Q6)	Extended family	Neighbours	Religious org	Local NGO	Self-help group	Savings/ credit group	Women's association	Peasants association	Youth association	Traditional authority	Community leader	Work colleague	Other
1													
2													
3													
4													
5													

6													
7													
8													
9													
10													
11													
12													

(Ask those from 17 and above)

B. KEY TYPES OF RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES

B1. Tangible/ economic risks

18. Has your household suffered from any of the following types of vulnerabilities over the last five years? Are particular family members more affected than others? If so, who?

Types of vulnerabilities (codes for risks)	1= yes; 2= no	Extent of cost burden 1 = small; 2 = medium; 3 = high	Which family members are affected the most (list up to 3 member ids from Q 6)		
			Mem code	Mem code	Mem code
1. Environmental vulnerabilities					
1.1 = pollution					
1.2= deforestation					
1.3=droughts					
1.4=floods					
1.5= death of livestock					
1.6=outbreak of insect and pests					
1.7= Others (specify)					
2. Economic vulnerabilities – a lack of:					
2.1. =employment					
2.2=regular employment					
2.3=adequate pay					
2.4= access to credit					
2.5=access to land					
2.6=access to productive assets					
2.7=access to markets					
2.8=access to extension services					
2.9=access to affordable education services					
2.10=access to affordable health services					
2.11=access to affordable vet services					
2.12= access to legal services					
2.13= access to clean water					
2.14= access fo housing					
2.15= access to nutrition programs					
2.16= access to food with affordable price					
2.17= increased the input's prices					
2.18= access to vocational training					
2.19= Others (specify)					
3. Lifecycle events- Costs associated with:					
3.1= weddings					
3.2= religious festivals					
3.3=funerals					
3.4=birth of another child					
3.5=death of a family member					
3.6=serious acute illness of a family member					
3.7= serious chronic illness					
3.8 = other					

B2: Social risks

19. In every family some household members are in need of more support than others. Do you have family members who fall into the following categories? In your family who is (are) the main care-giver(s) for the following and for how many hours a week?:

		Yes/No? If yes, how many?	Main care giver? (give code from q6)	Hours per week spent caring for this category of family member
1	Infants (0-3)			
2	Young children (3-11)			
3	Adolescents (12-18)			
4	Sick adults			
5	Disabled			
6	Aged			
7	Other			

20. In many families there are tensions and conflicts between men and women and young and old. In your household what are the key sources of these tensions/conflicts? Who are these tensions between?

Tension code	Types of tensions/ conflicts	1=Yes; 2=no	If Yes, between whom? 01 – husband and wife 02- children and parents 03 – children and grandparents 04 – daughter and mother-in-law 05 – daughter and father-in-law 06 – son and parents-in-law? 07- other, specify
22.1	Control over resources		
22.2	Decision making on expenditure		
22.3	Care / responsibility of children / sick / elderly		
22.4	Distribution of domestic responsibilities		
22.5	Decision-making over mobility		
22.6	Decision making over labour allocation		
22.7	Decision making about government or NGO programme participation		
22.8	Other, specify		
22.9	No tensions in household		

21. Does your household face any of the following types of social discrimination?

	1= yes; 2=no
Ethnicity	
HIV/AIDS status	
Poverty status	
Migrant status	
Female headed household status	
Have no son	
Other (specify)	

22. Has your household experienced any other big changes or events in the last few years?

- i) What have been the two most important changes? (positive or negative)
 - i. -----
 - ii. -----
- ii) What caused these changes?
 - i. -----
 - ii. -----

- iii) Have things got better or worse overall? _____
- iv) Have the changes had the same impact on all members of the household or have they been more significant for some members than others? If so for whom and why?

C. COPING STRATEGIES

23. Summarising from the previous section (see q20), what are the 2 most important tangible risks/challenges your family has faced over the last five years?

- a.
- b.

24. Summarising from the previous section (see qs21-23), what are the 2 most important social/intangible risks (e.g. time poverty, a lack of social capital, social discrimination, intra-household conflicts) your family has faced over the last five years?

- a.
- b.

25. For each of your four biggest risks (2 tangible and 2 social/intangible), what three main coping mechanism did you employ? (1=yes; 2= no) (use codes from questions 25 an 26).

	Risk 1 Code=____	Risk 2 Code=____	Risk 3 Code=____	Risk 4 Code=____
1. Received government / NGO support				
- Received a cash transfer [name]				
- Received an asset transfer [name]				
- Enrolled in public works programme [name]				
- Enrolled in social insurance programme (health, agriculture) [name]				
2. Undertook more paid work				
3. Undertook more unpaid work				
4.Reduced food consumption quantity for				
• Adult males				
• Adult females				
• Female children				
• Male children				
5.Reduced quality of food consumed for				
• Adult males				
• Adult females				
• Female children				
• Male children				
6. Relied on social networks for food, money or support				
7. Joined a group to which you previously didn't belong				
8. Joined a rights-based group				
9. Migrated				
• Adult males				
• Adult females				
• Female children				
• Male children				
10. Developed a new group				
11. Distress sale of assets. What was sold? To which family member did it belong? (use codes from Q6)				
12. Increased indebtedness				
13. Withdrew girls from school				
14.Withdrew boys from school				
15. Rely on son's labour				
16. Rely on girl's labour				
17. Other				

26. In order to cope with these risks, based on what we have just talked about your family has used the following main coping strategies [*summarise what interviewee has explained so far*].

- a.
- b.
- c.

However, we know that in some cases these types of coping mechanisms are not available or do not work. For example, in some places, some individuals or families might be forced to break up, desert certain members, abuse certain members, agree to send children away to work or for marriage, perpetrate physical, sexual, psychological violence against girls.

a) What types of problems like this are you aware of in your community? List three key problems.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

b) How widespread do you think these behaviours are in your community?

	Problem 1	Problem 2	Problem 3
01=not at all			
02=a little			
03=relatively widespread			
04=widespread			

D. IMPACT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION PROGRAMMING

27. What impact has your involvement in the NTPPR had on your household and household members' experiences of vulnerability and risk?

Member id (from q6)	Thời gian tham gia (nhận hỗ trợ) từ chương trình giảm nghèo của gia đình ta? 1= One month or less; 2= Six months or less ; 3= Up to one year 4=Up to two years; 5=Two years or more; 0=not participate; 99=not applicable						To what extent has the programme made a difference to tackling the risks identified above for the following family members? 1=High; 2=Medium; 3= Low; 4=No impact; 99=not applicable						What have been the positive impacts of the programme? (use Code 16)						What have been the negative impacts of the programme? (use Code 16.2)						
	Health	Education	Credit	Extension	Voc. training	Legal support	Health	Education	Credit	Extension	Voc. training	Legal support	Health	Education	Credit	Extension	Voc. training	Legal support	Education	Credit	Extension	Voc. training	Legal support	Education	
1																									
2																									
3																									
4																									
5																									
6																									
7																									
8																									
9																									
10																									
11																									
12																									

28. a) Do you think the NTPPR is more suitable for the following household members? (1=men, 2=women, 3=both, 4=children)
 b) If you think that NTPPR activities are more suitable for some family members than others, please explain.

Code 16.1 : positive impacts of the programme	Code 16.2 : negative impacts of the programme
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved livelihood security 2. Improved household consumption 3. Improved access to basic health services 4. Improved access to basic education services 5. Improved access to extension services 6. Improved access to credit 7. Decreased household tensions between men and women 8. Decreased household tensions between young and old 9. Reduced women's time poverty 10. Improved participation in the community 11. Improved women's decision-making power within the household 12. Reduced social exclusion in the community <p>Other</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transfer is inadequate 2. Conditionalities are too time-consuming to comply with 3. It only benefits one type of family member (not the whole household) 4. It provides a stop gap measure but does not lead to sustainable change 5. It creates tensions between men and women, children and adults 6. It aggravates existing tensions between men, women, adults or children 7. It aggravates time poverty 8. It is stigmatising 9. It is not flexible to existing household activities 10. It is not flexible to existing productive activities 11. It has not adequately addressed prevailing social norms/ attitudes 12. Another type of transfer/programme would be more suitable <p>Other</p>

Key informant interviews

Key information

Aims:

- To enrich our overview of social protection design and evaluation decision-making processes
- To explore political economy dimensions of the integration of gender into social protection policies and programmes
- To better understand implementation dynamics (of the above) at the sub-national level

Scope:

- National level GOs, NGOs, int'l agencies and donors
- Sub-national implementing agencies (GOs and NGOs)

Data collection required:

- Detailed notes about content of interviews in terms of our key questions above
- For issues relating to framing of social protection debates we require *verbatim* notes
- Recorded tape (preferable for back up purposes)
- Brief field notes describing interview dynamic and other relevant information
- Full list of key informants details – position, organisation name, where they fit in alignment influence matrix

Useful resources:

- DFID (2009) Political Economy Analysis How To Note

Key informant interviews at national level

1. Stakeholder analysis

- a. Map key social protection stakeholders according to the stakeholder analysis figure below (aligned and powerful). Include governmental, international and national agencies.
- b. Map women's agencies machineries – e.g. from national government level to local level (e.g. gender focal points)

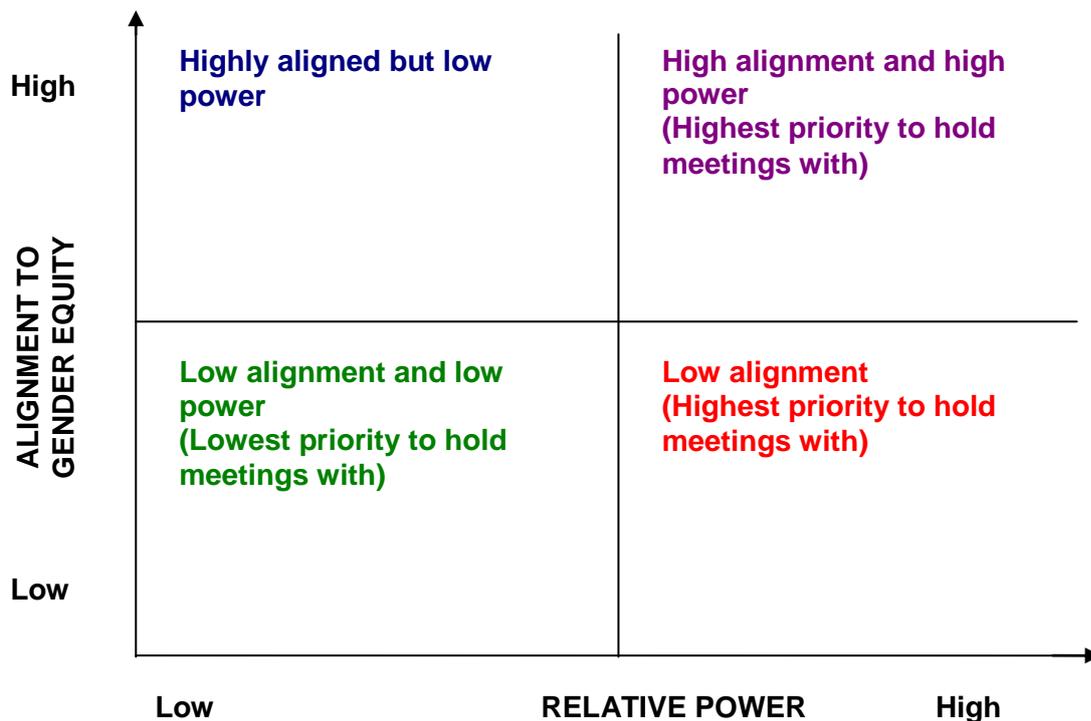
2. Key informant interviews – who to interview

- a. Refer to stakeholder analysis figure and prioritise meetings with “powerful” stakeholders (aligned and non-aligned)
- b. Identify who to talk to in an institution/organisation by starting with existing contacts and using the snowballing technique (asking them to refer you to other individuals in a given institution/organisation)

3. Semi-structured interview questions

- a. If you are unsure of whether the institution/organisation/individual is aligned or non-aligned, ask the non-aligned questions first to get an idea (then you can move to the aligned questions if appropriate)
- b. See matrix of questions below to give an idea of the types of questions we need to ask – please add in specific country-focused/specific social protection programme questions if/when appropriate

Key social protection stakeholders



Key informant questions at national level

N.B. In order to avoid standard answers on gender, it is important that interviewers refer back to the background work to identify key gendered risks and vulnerabilities and social risks which can be used to prompt the interviewee to think in more depth and more systematically about gender in social protection policy and design.

NOT ALIGNED Objectives: 1. To understand to what extent gender has been integrated in to the design of social protection policy and programme	Country/Programme-specific additions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the main goals of your social protection programme / policy? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors have been most influential in the development of social protection? (e.g. government priorities, attainment of MDGs, civil society pressure, donor funding). • What are some of the challenges which constrain the scaling up of social protection? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent do you think that the types of vulnerabilities and risks your programme is trying to address (e.g. see goals above) have been considered by gender? Can you give some examples? (prompts can be used to refer interviewee to country specific risks and vulnerabilities) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent are social risks considered in social protection programmes in your context (can prompt with country specific examples of social risks and vulnerabilities)? What explains your view? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of evidence shapes the design and evaluation of social protection policy and programmes? (e.g. poverty data and analysis? disaggregated by gender? Programme M&E?) 	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With which actors (NGO and GO) do you work most closely on this agenda? 	•
<p>ALIGNED Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To identify the pathways (recent and historical) in which gender has been successfully integrated into the design of social protection policy and programming at a national level; 2. To identify the key actors driving the social protection and gender agenda forward; 3. To identify the challenges which have been overcome (or still need to be overcome) to successfully integrate gender into the design and implementation of social protection policy and programme. E.g. political / ideological resistance from other Ministries/departments/organisations? Administrative challenges – e.g. resources, staff capacity, co-ordination? 	Country/Programme-specific additions
KEY QUESTIONS	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In what ways is gender integrated into the design of social protection policy and programming in your context? Can you provide some specific examples? (Prompts can be used to refer interviewee to country-specific gendered risks and vulnerabilities) 	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What strategies have been used so far to integrate a gender perspective into social protection design? 	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the challenges/ tensions involved in enhancing the integration of gender into social protection policies and programmes? 	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the potential opportunities for strengthening gender sensitivity of social protection design and implementation? 	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What factors (political economy, cultural drivers and historical legacies) have shaped policy choices about social protection? (in general and at specific historical junctures (e.g. 2008 food price crisis?). • To what extent have these factors in turn shaped the relative strength of a gender perspective in social protection policy decision-making? 	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the role of research and/or programme evidence within this decision-making process? 	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the constellation of actors (GOs and NGOs) which have influenced the decision-making process around social protection and gender? 	•
<p>INFLUENCE (ask to all interviewees)</p> <p>Objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assess the relative influence of key actors in shaping the social protection agenda 	Country/Programme-specific additions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your role in informing / influencing the design / resource allocation to social protection policy and programming? How would you rate your influence in the social protection decision-making arena in comparison to other actors? What accounts for this? 	•
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of national / international civil society in shaping the social protection agenda in your country? 	•

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the role of the donor community in shaping the social protection agenda? 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role has research or programme evidence played in this process? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role has the framing of specific social protection debates played in this process? E.g. do different actors have different objectives for social protection? (E.g. rights based approaches? social protection for non-productive poor (children and elderly?) or social protection to contribute to economic growth / food security etc). What are these? Have different discourses on social protection this created conflict or tensions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •

In addition, questions can be asked to plug specific knowledge gaps that were not addressed through the matrix or literature review:

- a) M&E systems
- b) Data collection systems especially with regards to gender indicators
- c) Learning from programme implementation

Key informant interviews at sub-national level: implementers, programme staff, local government

N.B. In order to avoid standard answers on gender, it is important that interviewers refer back to the background work to identify key gendered risks and vulnerabilities and social risks which can be used to prompt the interviewee to think in more depth about gender in social protection policy and design.

- A) Coverage (gendered and general)**
- B) Quality (gendered and general)**
- C) Underlying reasons for quality and coverage of implementation**

Implementing / coordinating agencies	Country/programme-specific additions
COVERAGE	
Are you satisfied with the implementation of the programme to the target population so far? Why (or why not)?	
Can you tell us more concretely the results of coverage to date? (disaggregated by sex, social group etc.)?	
Are there any barriers which women face in particular to participating (partially or fully) in the programme (e.g. timing of participation in the programme conflicts with domestic and/or income generating activities; women are not allowed to move freely to participate in programme meetings). Do these challenges differ by age? How can the barriers be overcome?	
If you want more coverage of specific target groups (e.g. women and girls) what are the constraints and how would you overcome them? (Explore the socio-economic constraints, and at different levels (hh, intra-hh etc))	
Do you think there are social groups which have not been included that should be included and why? (e.g. outside the scope of the existing social protection programme?)	
QUALITY	
To what extent do the people in charge of operationalising the programme have knowledge on gender or are sensitised to gender issues?	
To what extent have women been consulted in the design	

and implementation of the programme?	
Are there any complaints mechanisms which beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (excluded) can access?	
Does the programme's implementation consider gender vulnerabilities / constraints that might reduce its impact or reach? (e.g. women's time constraints, child care responsibilities etc). Please give examples.	
What measures have been put in place to promote a more equitable demand for the uptake of the programme e.g. communications / information?	
UNDERLYING REASONS FOR COVERAGE AND QUALITY	
What have been the roles of each level of government in the implementation of the programme? Which kinds of conflicts have arisen? e.g. resources, decision-making. How could these conflicts be resolved?	
To what extent are different agencies involved in delivering social protection? E.g. gender-focused organisations/government departments (e.g. women's affairs offices). To what extent are the gender focal points involved or briefed in programme implementation?	
How is staff capacity evaluated for implementation of the programme? What are the main limitations? (staff capacity number or quality)	
Are the resources available sufficient for effectively delivering the programme? Do the implications of resource constraints affect women and men differently? To what extent are the gender components outlined in policy/programme design documents budgeted and allocated? (e.g. child care facilities)	
Is there conflict between institutional objectives and programme objectives for the main implementer of the programme?	
To what extent has civil society been involved in the social protection programme?	
To what extent is there demand at the community level for the programme? Who has been taking the lead role in this?	
To what extent has the implementation of the social protection programme had spill-over effects to the implementation of complementary services (e.g. basic services).	

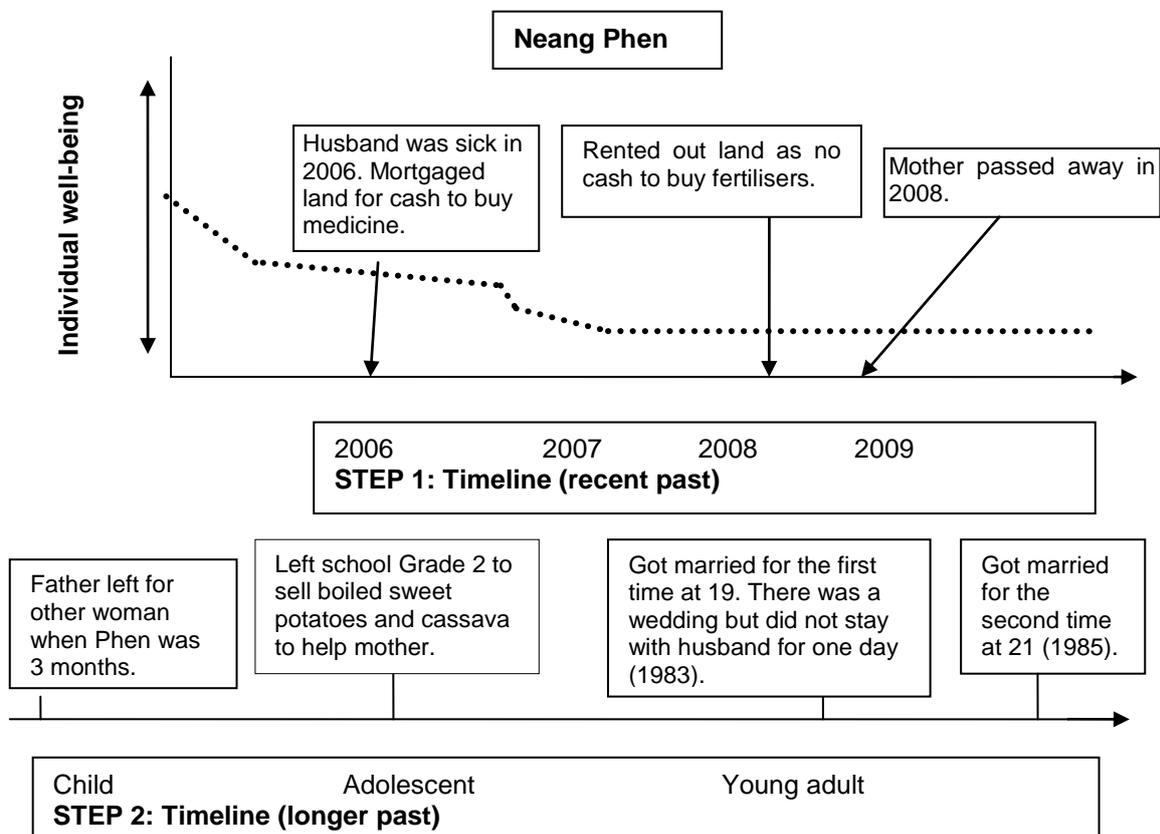
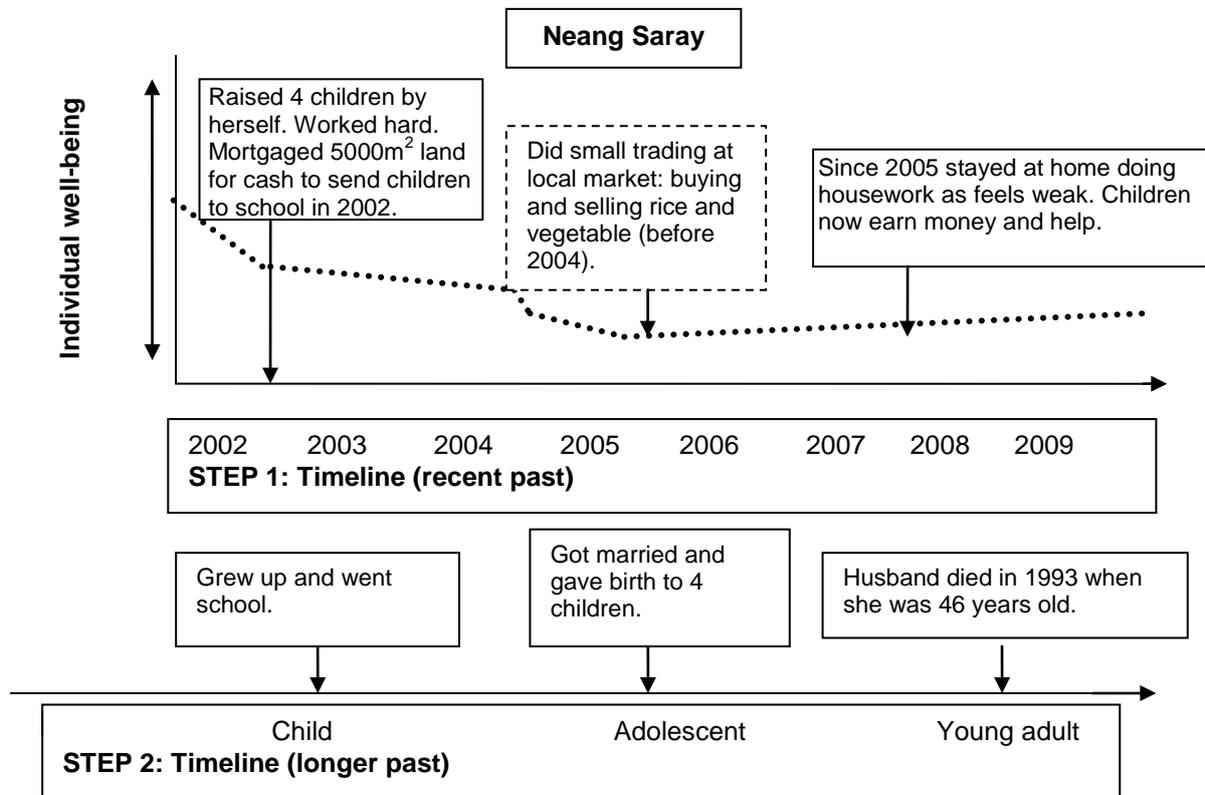
Annex 3: Key informant interview list

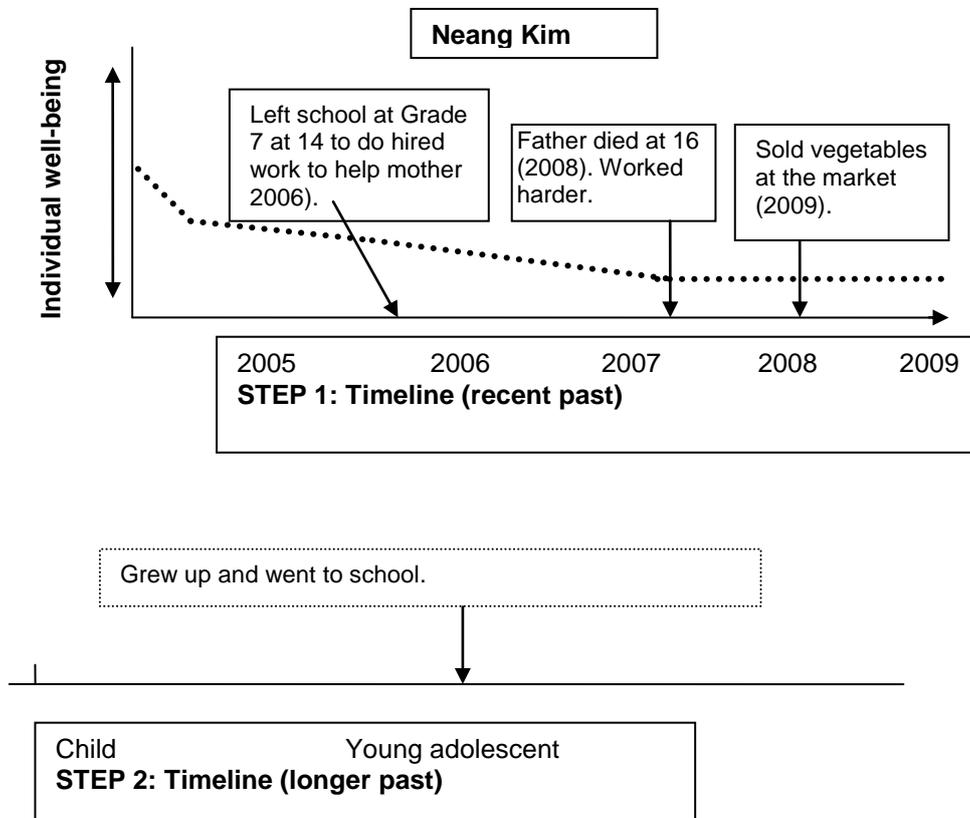
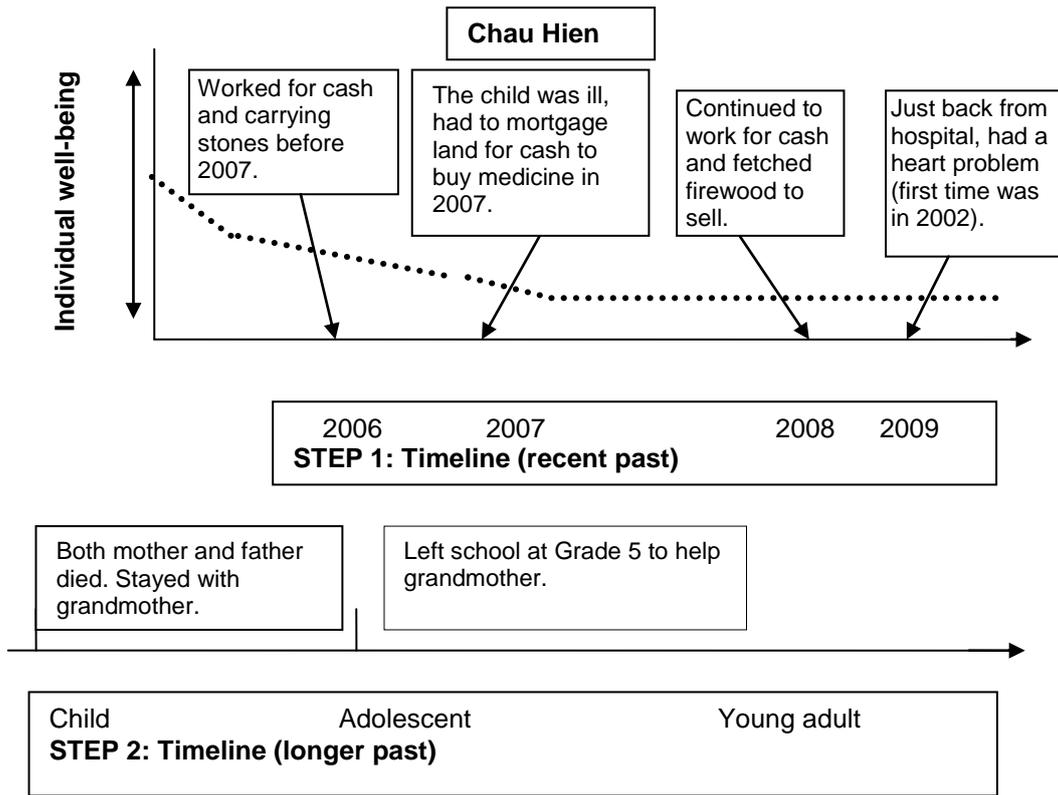
	Location	Institution	Name of informant and role
1.	Hanoi	Institute of Sociology (VASS)	Dr Do Thien Kinh, Researcher, Department of Rural Sociology
2.		Centre for Analysis and Forecasting (VASS)	
3.		National Assembly SAC	Ms Nguyen Thuy Anh, Director, Department for Social Affairs
4.		MOLISA	Mr Nguyen Huu Trung, Head of Social Protection Department
5.		MPI	Ms Nguyen Thi Hong Le, Head of Department of Labour, Cultural and Social Affairs Mr Ngo Xuan Quyet Mr Dang Van Nghi
6.		Ministry of Finance	Vu Hanh Chinh Su Nghiep, Department of Administration Ms Nguyen Thi Thu Hien, Deputy Head of Division of Cultural and Social Affairs Ms Vu Thi Hai Yen, Deputy Head of Division of Health Insurance
7.		MOET	Mr Nguyen Anh Tuan, Department of Finance and Planning
8.		MARD	Mr Phung Duc Hiep, Deputy Head of Division of Planning and Finance, Department of Cooperatives and Rural Development Mr Bui Truong Minh Mr Vi Viet Hoang
9.		CEMA – P135	Ha Viet Quan, Deputy Head of the P135 Office
10.		VWU	Ms Nguyen Thi Kim Thuy, Deputy Chairperson
11.		ActionAid Viet Nam	Ms Ha Thi Quynh Anh, Women's Rights Coordinator Mr Saroj Dash, Thematic and Governance Manager
12.		World Bank	Mr Daniel Mont, Senior Economist Mr Doan Hong Quang, Senior Economist
13.		UNDP	Ms Tanja Nopenen, Gender Specialist Ms Ha Thi Van Khanh, Gender Focal Point Ms Vo Hoang Nga, Programme Officer of Poverty and Social Development Cluster
14.		UNIFEM	Ms Suzette Mitchell, Country Programme Manager
15.		UN Resident Coordinators Office	Ms Ingrid FitzGerald, UN Gender Advisor
16.		AusAID	Ms Nguyen Mai Chi, Senior Programme Manager, Governance Nguyen Thanh An, Assistant Country Manager, ACIAR Viet Nam Nguyen Quoc Viet, Senior Programme Manager, Rural Development
17.		ILO	Jonna Naumanen, Programme Officer of Poverty and Youth
18.		NGO Resource Centre Viet Nam	Marko Lovrekovic, Managing Co-Director
19.		Oxfam QB Oxfam Belgium	Ms Julie Theroux-Seguin, Gender Advisor Nguyen Thu Huong, Programme Officer
20.		DFID	Ms Kirsty Mason (on phone)
21.		UNICEF	Paul Quarles Van Ufford, Social Policy Specialist Nguyen Thi Van Anh, Social Policy Specialist
22.	AG	DOLISA	Mr Lê Thanh Sơn, Head of Social Protection Unit
23.		Department of Education and Training	Ms Nguyễn Thị Nga, Deputy Head of Personnel
24.		Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	Mr Phạm Thái Bình, Deputy Head of Rural Development Mr Nguyễn Anh Tuấn, Officer Mr Đoàn Ngọc Phả, Officer
25.		Department of Health	Mr Từ Quốc Tuấn, Director

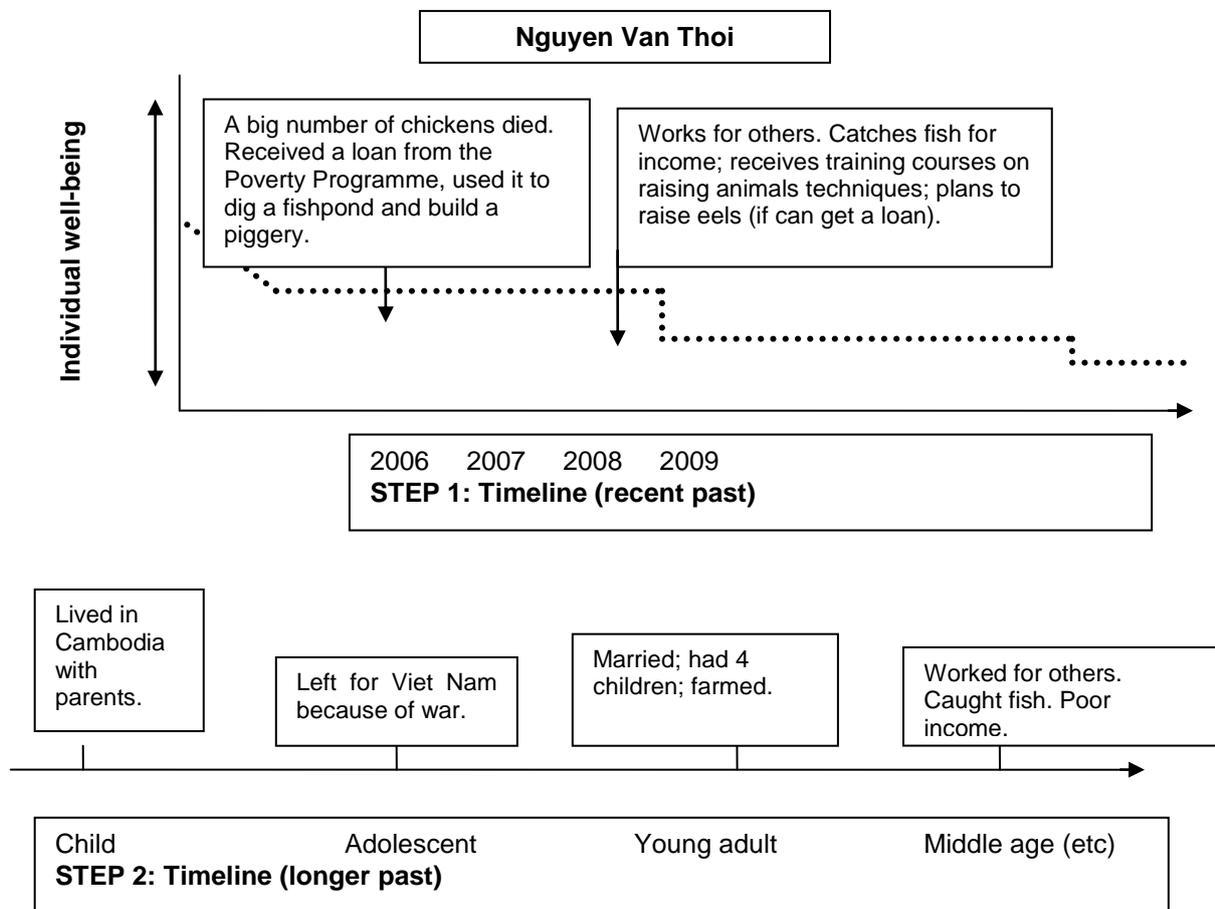
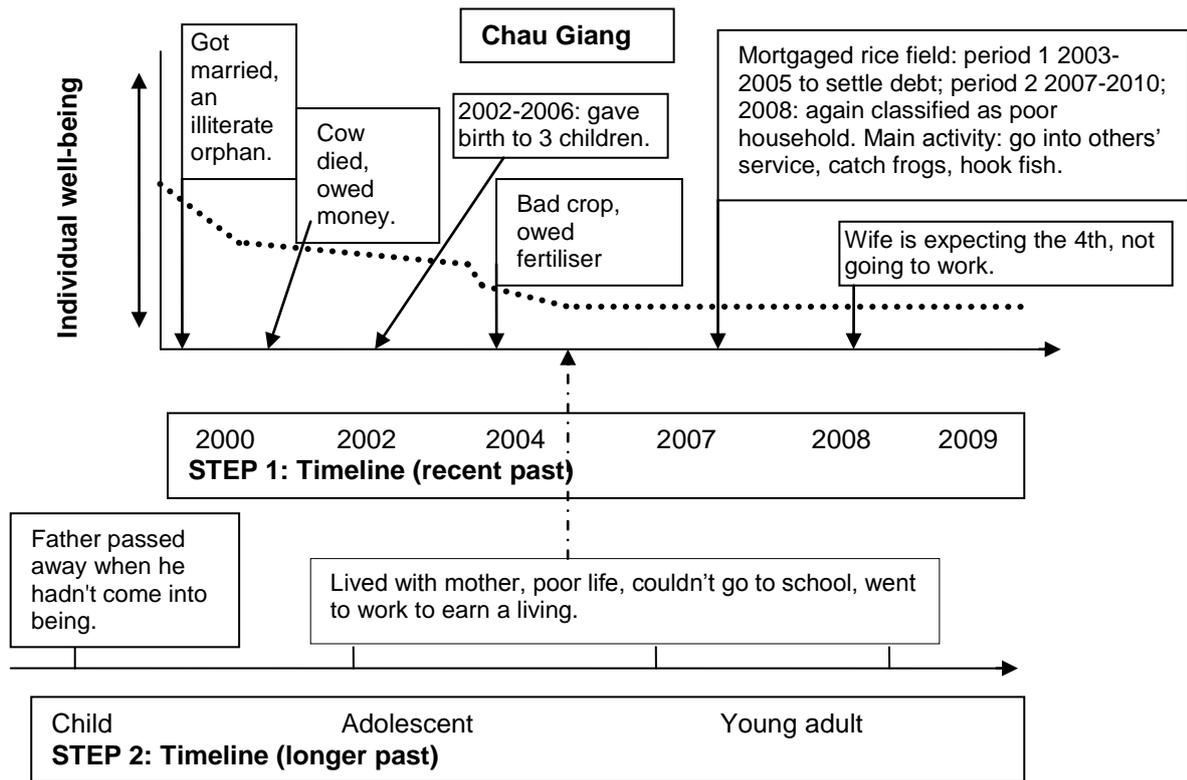
			Dr Bùi Văn Sinh, Head of Planning
26.		Women's Union	Ms Hai, Deputy Chairwoman, Ms Hanh, Head of Personnel Department Ms Chi, Head of Family and Social Affairs Department
27.		Co To Commune Poverty Reduction Team	Mr Hua Hong Tien, Poverty Reduction Officer Mr Pham Van Hieu, Agriculture Extension Officer
28.	HG	Co To Commune Health Centre	Mr Nguyen Van Huu, Head of HC
29.		DOLISA	Mr Phạm Ngọc Dũng, Head of Social Protection
30.		Department of Education and Training	Ms Triệu Thị Liên, Deputy Director
31.		Department of Health	Mr Trần Đức Quý, Director Mr Hoàng Hồng Tư, Deputy Head of Planning and Finance Ms Hoàng Thị Chung, Head of Pharmaceuticals Mr Lưu Đình Mạnh, Deputy Inspector Mr Nguyễn Bá Văn, Head of Medicines Ms Nguyễn Thị Bích Liên, Deputy Head of Secretariat
32.		Women's Union	Ms Nguyễn Thị Kiều Liên, Chairperson
33.		Lao Va Chai Commune Party Committee	Mr Sung, Vice-Secretary
34.		Lao Va Chai Commune Agricultural Extension	Mr Hoang Van Tuyen, Agriculture Extension Officer
35.		Lao Va Chai Health Centre	Dr Nguyen Thi Hoa Hong
36.		Lao Va Chai Women's Union	Ms Xuân Thị Hiền, Chairperson

Annex 4: Life histories

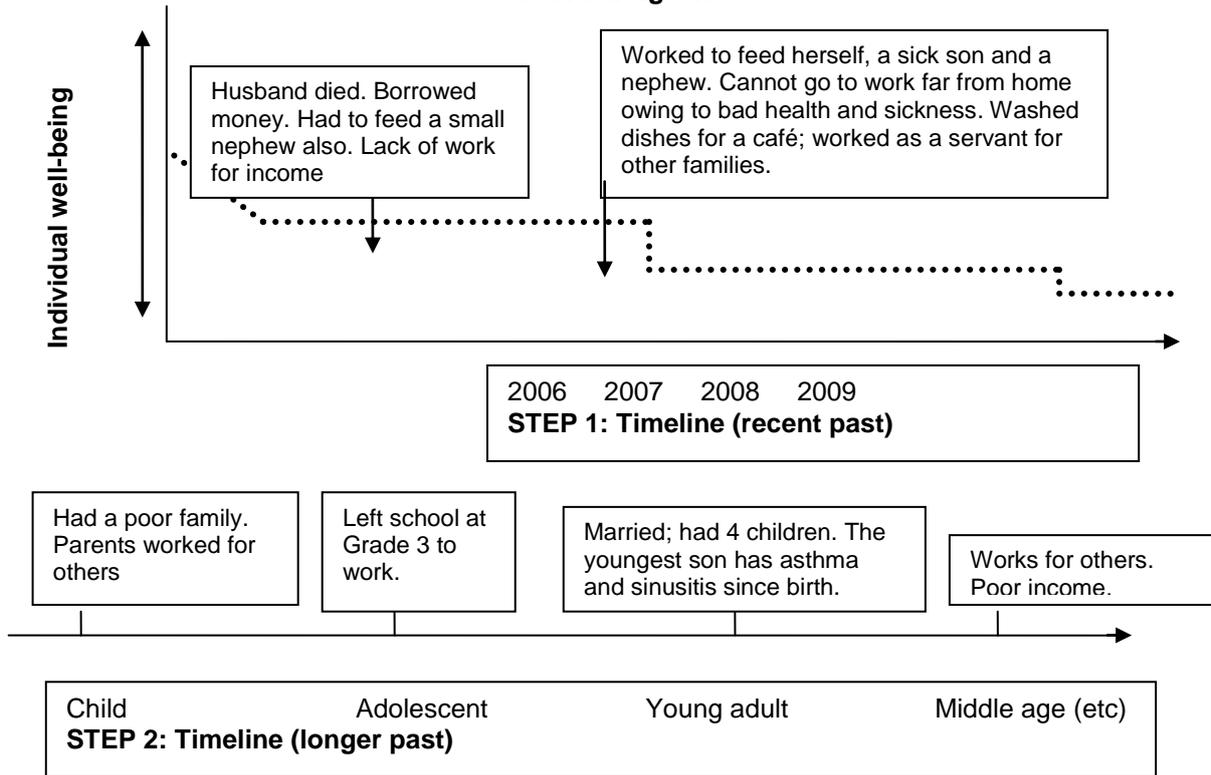
An Giang



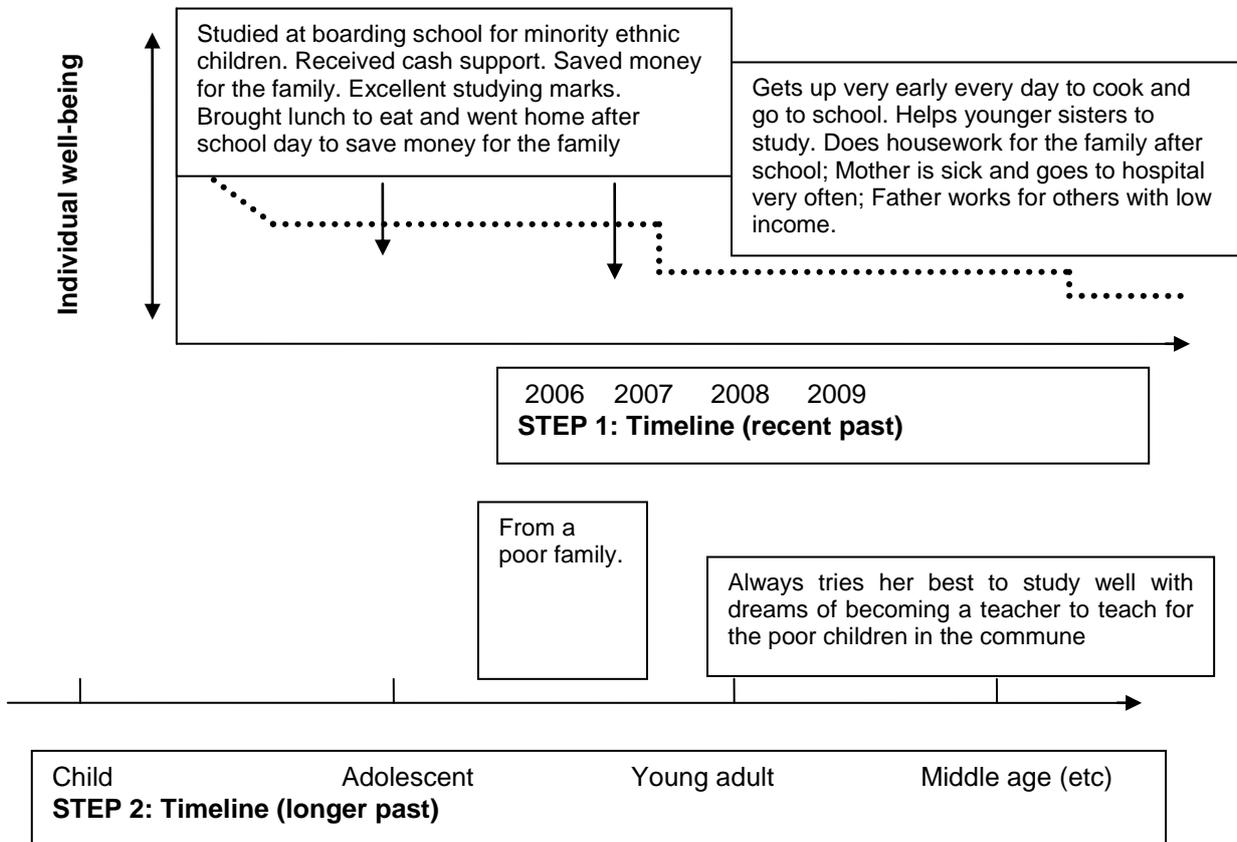


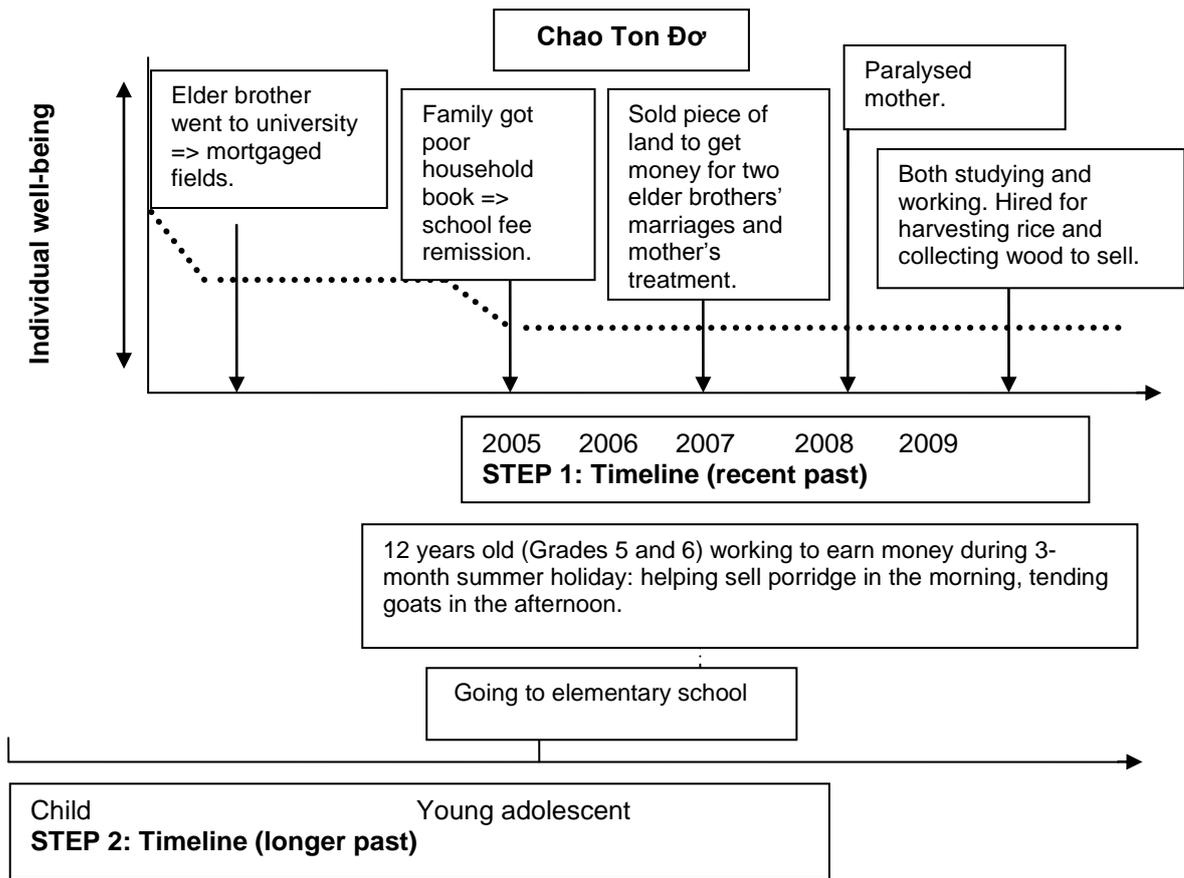


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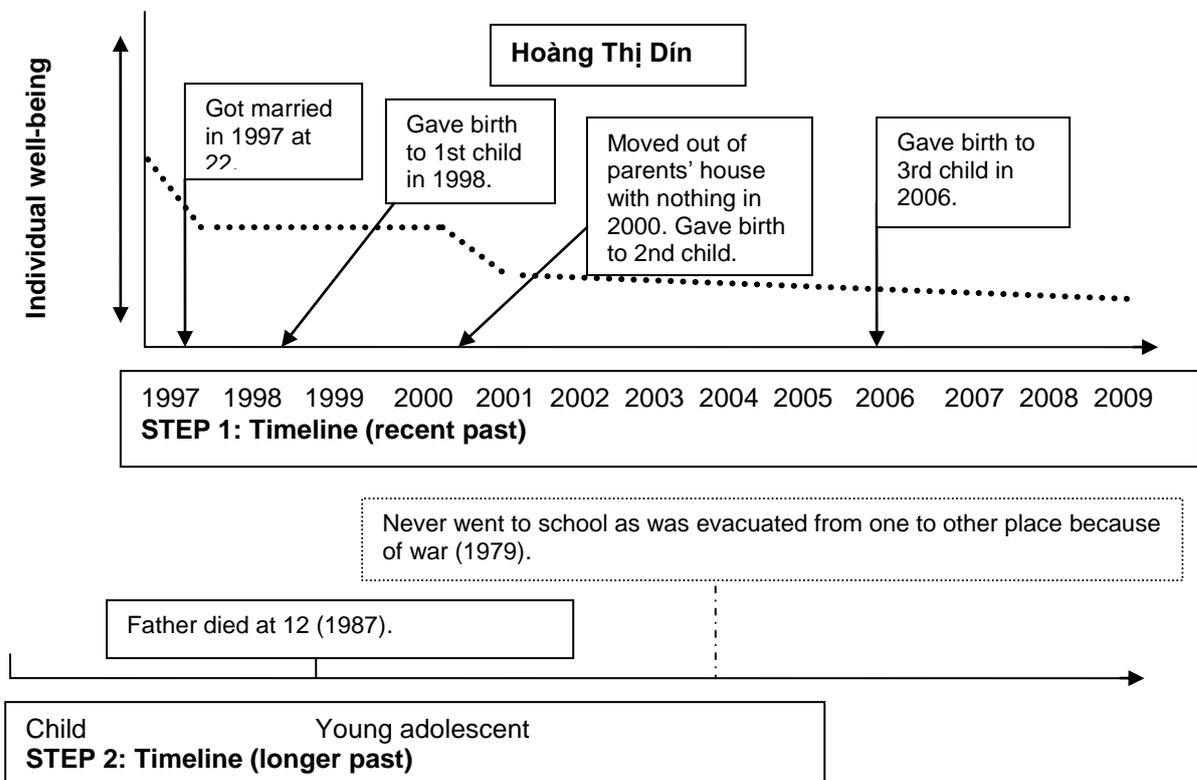


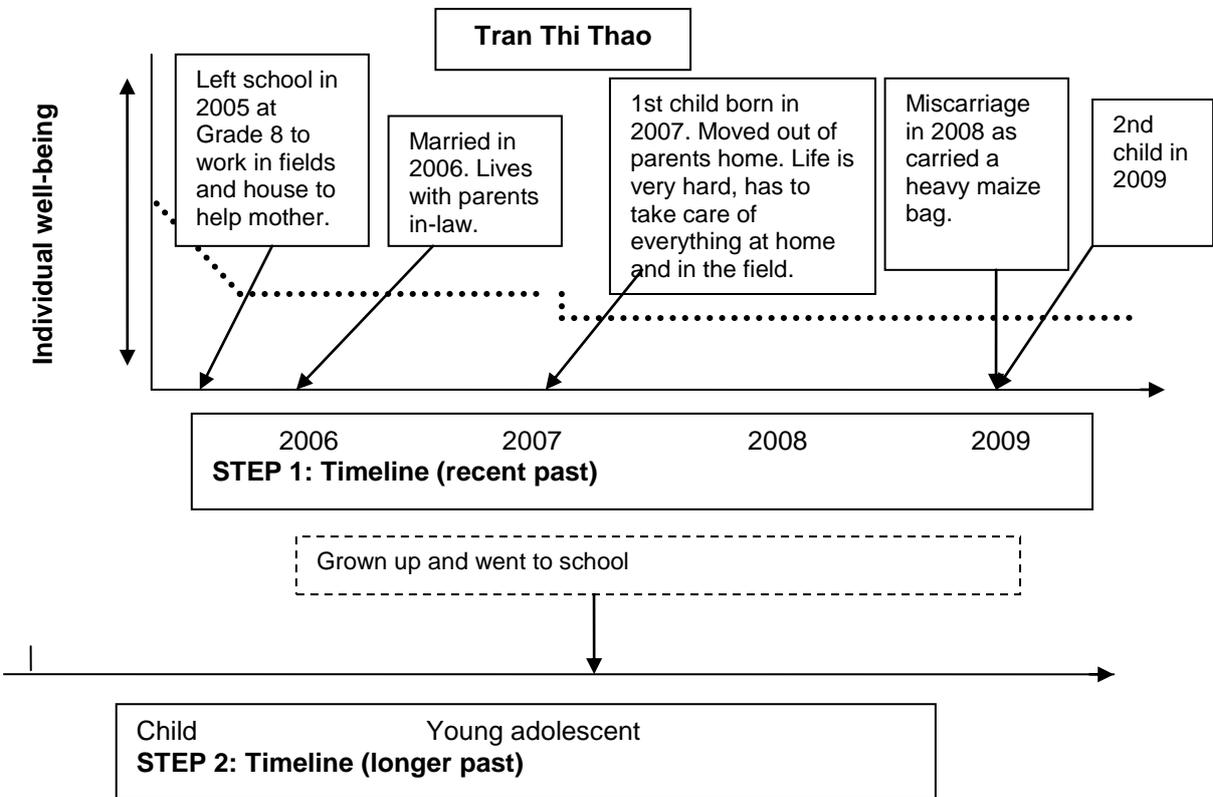
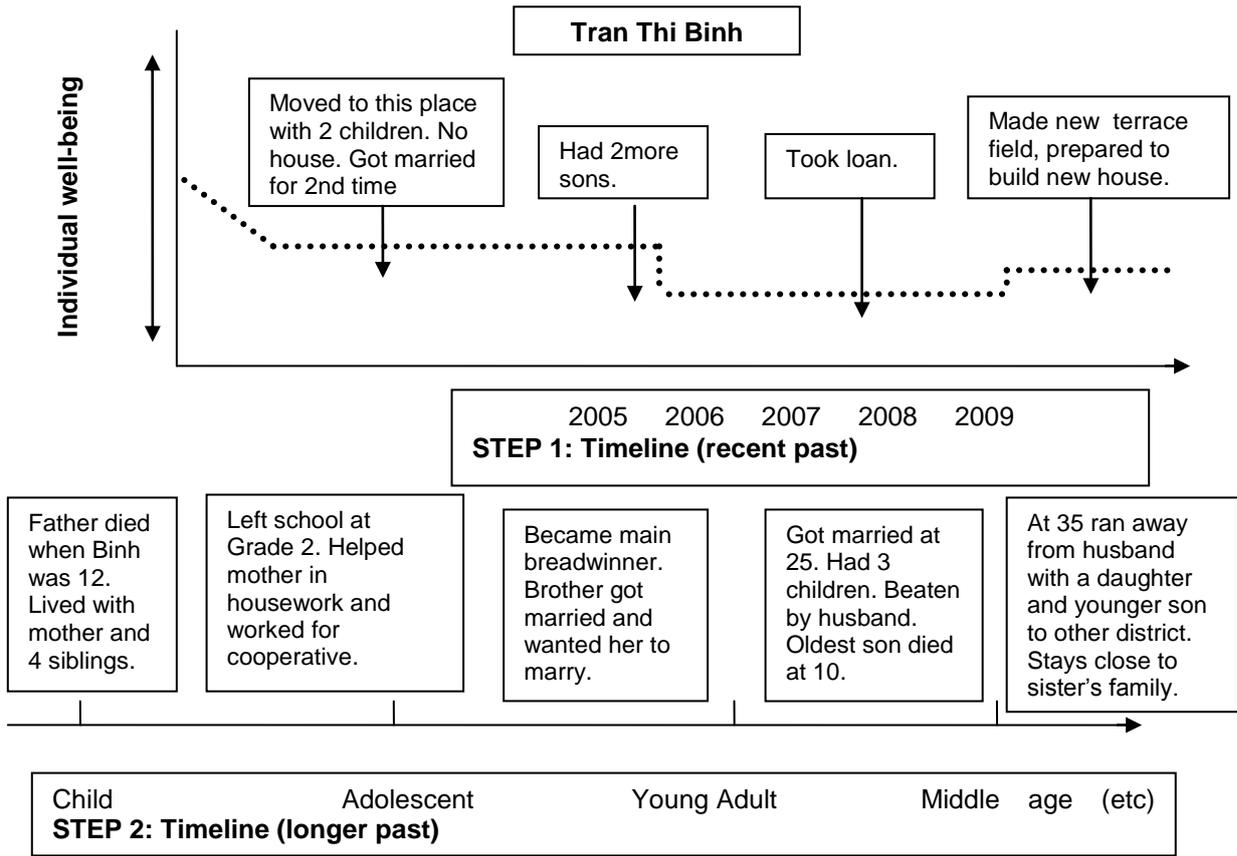
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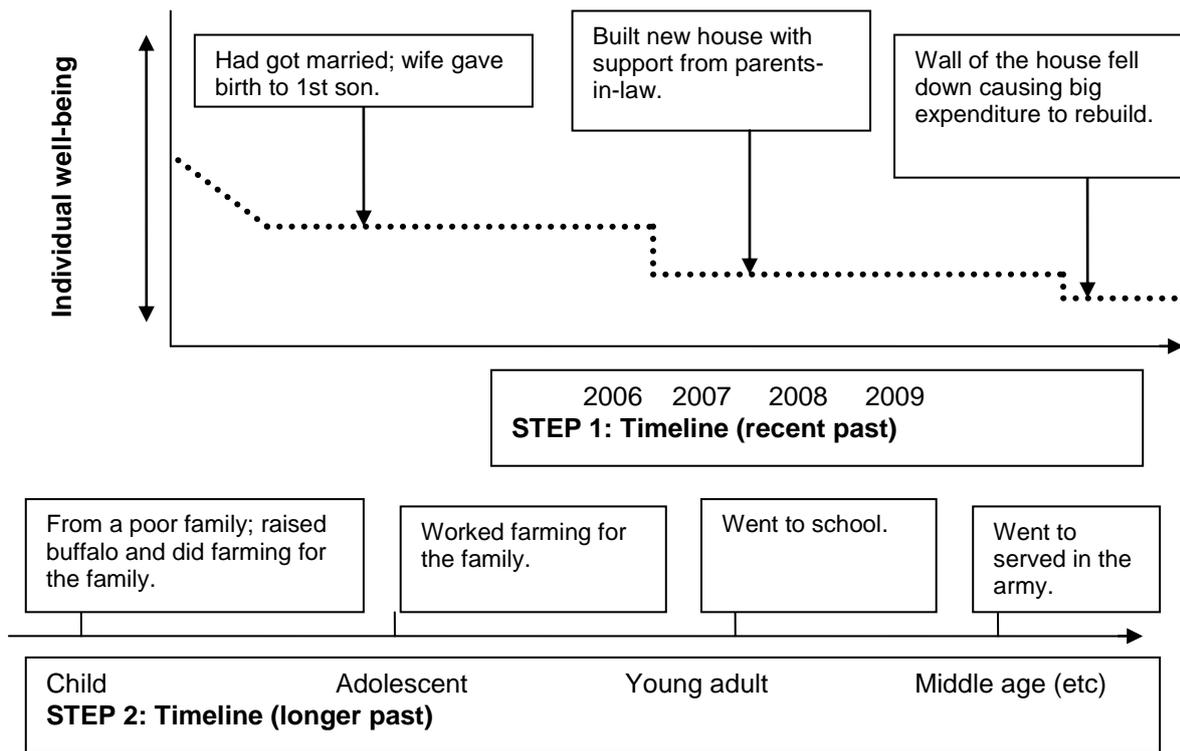


Hagiang





Vang Mi Vu



Chang Thi My

