

Vietnam paper on social protection for women

1. Definition of social protection in Vietnam and the relevant legal mandates on social protection

In the modern society and civilization of access to social protection policies based on human rights. That is the direction to better meet the social protection needs of all people and promote social inclusion vulnerable groups, especially groups with higher risk of social exclusion (helpless old people, children there are special circumstances, the disabled, people with HIV / AIDS ...) through the development of a complete system of national social protection policies and flexible multi-layered.

Social protection is ensuring people with minimum income and minimum access of services 's quality in health, houses, pure water and information via improving self- capability of social protection of people, assistance from State, activities of insurance and voluntary contribution system from organizations and individuals in managing and controlling risks of unemployment, old age, illness, natural disaster and market economy, etc, leading to decrease or be unemployed in temporary and permanence. In 2009, United Nation adopted the Social Protection Floor Initiative with the aim at guaranteeing the minimum income and vital social service's access for all in order to ensure their fundamental human rights recognised by nations and the global community for the goal of poverty reduction and social protection.

Key components of the "social protection floor" are: (i) basic health care; (ii) minimum income for the people at working age but with no permanent working capacity (the disable) or with temporary unemployment (the unemployed), or with the lower income level than the poverty line (the poor); (iii) the minimum income for the people out of working age (elderly) and the people not having reached the working age (children).

Objectives of social protection policy is for everyone. In which, it is focused on the poors, people who have extremely difficult circumstance, ethnic minority in poor district, commune, especially people who get difficulty / risks from natural disaster, fire, accidents in life that they or their family can not afford to overcome and tend to be falled in poverty, etc.

Resolution of the XIth Party Congress clearly stated: "achieving visible progresses in executing social progresses and justice, assuring social protection, reducing poverty rate; improving health care condition for people". Continuing to clarify the viewpoints, orientations and specific contents for particular social protection policies, Socio-economic development strategy in the period of 2011 to 2020 emphasizes: "developing a diverse, more expanded and effective social protection system; fostering development of socialinsurance, unemployment insurance, insurance for industrial accidents and diseases; encouraging and creating favourable conditions for people to access and participate in different types of insurance; better implemeting preferential policies and continuing improving living standards for national devotees; expanding different types of social relief, espeically for those with extrem disadvantages".

Resolution No. 15-NQ/TW dated June 1st 2012 of the Central Party Committee

set the target: “Social policy must be as important as economic one, i.e., social development must be in association together with economic progress, which is relevant to the country’s development and capable resources by specific period”; putting emphasis on specific needs of people, ensuring minimum living standards for people and timely assist those with disadvantage.

Social protection system in Vietnam

Vietnam’s social protection system has three main functions:

- Risk management: Social protection system aims at better managing risks via three main pillars: (i) risk prevention: assisting people to actively prevent risks related to their health, lives, production activities and instabilities of the natural environment; (ii) risk minimization: helping people to have sufficient resources to substitute the income shortages caused by incidents in their lives, health, production and business activities and the natural environment; (iii) risk recovery: timely assisting people to minimize unexpected or overcontrolled impacts caused by incidents in their lives, health, production and business activities and the natural environment, guaranteeing the minimum living standards for people.

- Income redistribution: including Poverty reduction policies, schemes of regular and emergency social assistance for the disadvantaged, vulnerable. This employs the principle of “using young people’s contributions to pay elderly’s benefits” in social insurance and “using healthy people’s contributions to cover the treatment cost for sick people” in health insurance to redistribute income among population groups, creating a sharing mechanism for people when they face with the health, production or natural risks.

- Social cohesion: In a process of market economy development, social stratification have become clearer. Effective risk management and income redistribution will help to strengthen social cohesion, to ensure sustainable development outcomes and to share among people in society.

The social protection system of Vietnam has been developed based on the principle of risk management, which at the same time emphasizes the role of the provision of basic social services to the people. It consists of 4 following sets of fundamental policies:

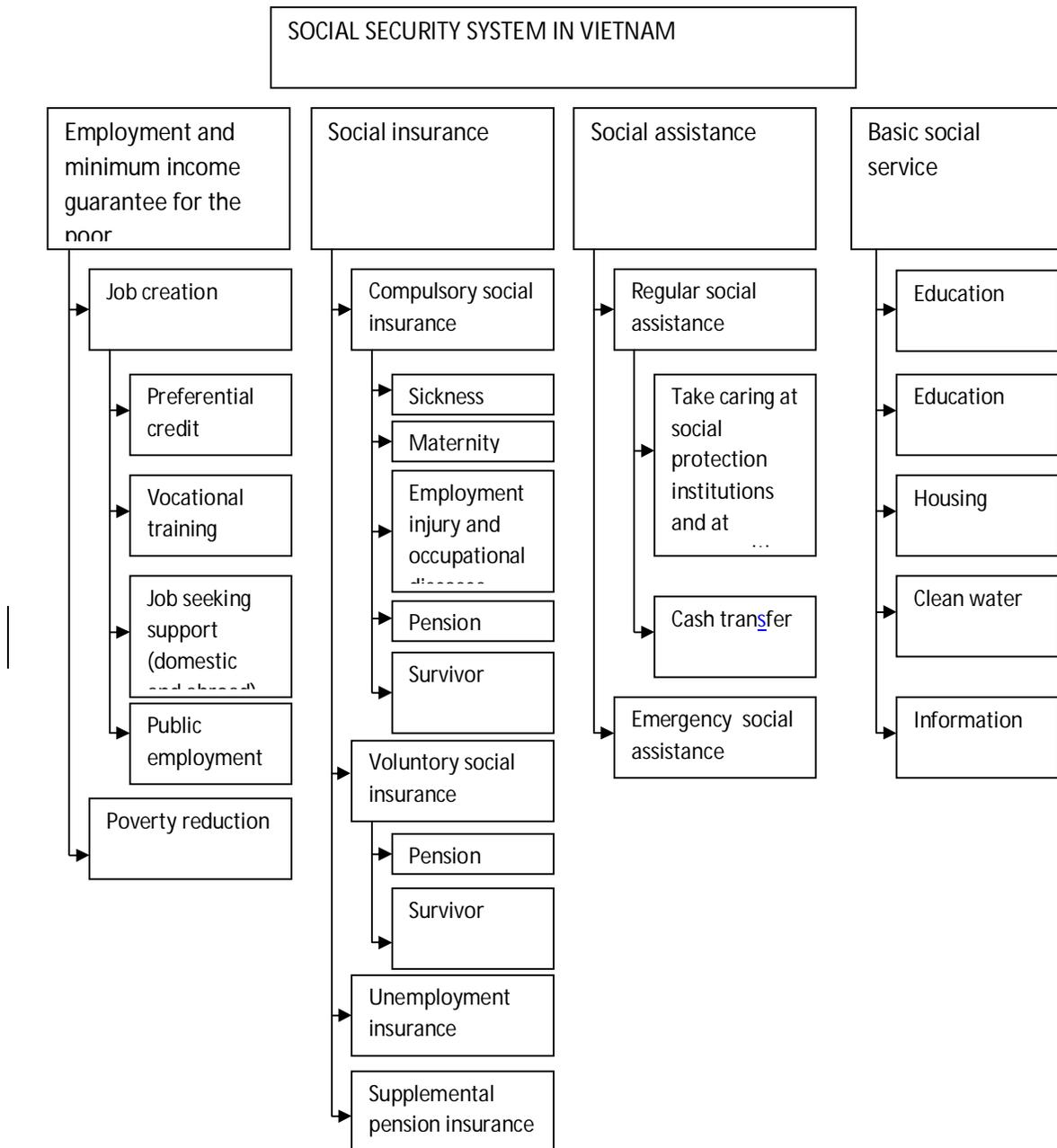
- Employment policies to ensure minimum income and poverty reduction: these aims to support the people to proactively prevent risks via the participation in the labor markets to have good employment, minimum income and sustainable poverty reduction.

- Policies for social insurance: these aim to support the people to mitigate risks of sickness, occupational accident, old age...via participation in the social insurance system to make up for the reduction or loss of incomes due to above risks.

- Policies for social assistance: these include regular and emergency assistance policies to support the people in overcoming the unexpected or beyond control risks (crop failure, hunger, chronic poverty).

Policies for basic social services are to increase access by the people to the basic services, which includes basic education, minimum health care, minimum housing, clean water and information and communication.

Diagram1: Vietnam's social protection system in 2012-2020¹



2. Existing programs on social protection for women in MSMEs

Improving access to social security for women in MSMEs Vietnam has implemented some programs:

- (i) Vocational training for women (including start-up business program): The project to support women's vocational development centre in Vietnam (Start in 2011, MOLISA – Vietnam, Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, Korea); Vocational training for woman programmes implemented by Vietnam Women Union, etc

¹Resolution No. 15-NQ/TW of the Central Party Committee (session 5) on June 1st 2012.

(ii) Microfinance programmes provided by Microfinance Institutions/Members of VMFWG such as TYM (Vietnam Women's Union), Center for Women and Community Development (CWCD); Pro-Poor Center (PPC) Ha Tinh; The Center of Small Enterprises Development Assistance (SEDA); Microfinance Fund for Community Development – MFCDI (Microfinance and Community Development Institute), etc.

Some projects and activities are:

(iii) The project on HIV/AIDS prevention at workplace: The project was started in 2009, supported by Chemonics International. There were 118 enterprises in 7 provinces/cities with high percentage of female worker, mostly are migrant workers had joined the project. More than 90,000 employees in which almost are woman have participated in activities of the project and being aware of the HIV/AIDS prevention knowledge. The project has helped to raise awareness for enterprises on HIV/AIDS prevention and set up pioneer group in each enterprise for communication and propagandizing activities.

(iv) The project on sexual harassment prevention at workplace: In 2013, VWEC in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Vietnam implemented the pilot program on sexual harassment prevention at workplace.

(v) The Gender Economic Development Working Group (GED): VWEC is one of the 03 Founders of GED WG, together with ILO in Vietnam and PyD. GEDWG was established in 2011 consisting of organizations which voluntarily participate in developing activities to promote the *process of women's empowerment in business and economic development* and contribute efforts for the realization of the gender equality in Vietnam. Taking full advantage of resources; build capacity for members of the working group; provide tools for members to: (1) create opportunities and favorable environment for women to establish and run business effectively; (2) support the group of disadvantaged women to eliminate hunger and reduce poverty; (3) provide recommendations and lobby policies on gender in business.

3. Other community based social protection programs

Provincial Banks for Social Policies were deploying more than ten preferential loan programs. Most of the programs applied entrust loans through local Women's Councils in the form of "Savings and loans group". Women's Council is a most prestigious entrusted channel, ensuring right target beneficiaries, quick disbursement and good capital preservation.

Basically, Vietnam erased "blank commune" of kindergarten education. Primary school system was opened in each hamlet; secondary schools were built in each commune or group of communes. Single school points, classes in villages, multi-grade class were opened in almost all mountainous, remote and severely difficult hamlets, villages, creating chances for ethnic minority boys and girls to go to school.

4. Gaps and challenges in implementing social protection programs for women in MSMEs

Vietnam is in the context of transition and deeper integration into the world economy. Women have more opportunities to participate actively in the poverty reduction and household, community and country development. However, there are still problems of discrimination, gender inequality and other social barriers for women in accessing social services and employment opportunities for income. Women spent most of their time at home or at work with low paid and doing unskilled jobs.

Firstly, the implementation of social protection for women is facing many difficulties and challenges. The results of social protection for women are unsatisfactory and not sustainable. Especially, since 2008, Vietnam is experiencing declining growth and instability with series of emerging socio-economic issue adversely affecting social protection's implementation and people's employment and life. Women are among the most affected. These issues will reduce the poverty rate and affect the implementation of human development goals and gender equality objectives.

Secondly, despite many efforts to improving gender understanding for related female groups, the result of raising awareness of gender integration into policies in general and social protection policies in particular are short of expectation in both quantity and quality aspects.

Gender equality awareness is still limited. The real gender equality has not yet gained in social protection. Only few social protection policies have been taken into account the gender issue, accounting for a few percent in total social protection policies. Some other policies treat females/girls as prior beneficiaries; however the policies often only address female immediate needs (eating, wearing, housing, travelling) but do not completely care about female strategic needs (improving status). Women and girls are still disadvantageous groups, especially poor households, ethnic minority and special disadvantaged areas.

5. Lessons learned in implementing social protection programs for women MSMEs

i. Implement integration of gender equality objectives into the implementation of Resolution 15 and Resolution 70 on Social Security at all levels nationwide through campaigns and raising awareness among relevant agencies of gender integration in social security; organise training in gender integration for relevant officials; and enhance inspection and supervision, and penalisation of violations.

ii. Institutionalise the "System of monitoring and assessment of gender equality objectives in Resolution 15 on social security" for promulgation and implementation as of 2014 in the whole country. Develop technical documents to guide the application of the monitoring and assessment system at all levels (national, ministerial/branch and provincial/municipal levels): assign MOLISA in coordination with the General Statistics Office to implement. Budget and resources required to operate the monitoring and assessment system at all levels to be allocated by the Government. Develop an update database system on social security for women and girls.

iii. Based on the findings of this study on social security legislation and policy systems, competent agencies to be assigned by the State to remove and amend regulations featuring gender discrimination (direct and indirect); remove/aggregate overlapping policies in the same domain; and regulate coordination mechanisms for relevant policy groups for the same subjects for maximum effect.

iv. The Government should conduct research and develop services and products in accordance to the four main pillars of the social security system, to satisfy women and girls' minimum needs.

v. International organisations provide technical and financial support to implement social security in MSMEs./.