

ANJA NITZSCHE, *Frauen, Marktwirtschaft und Patriarchat - Auswirkungen der gesellschaftlichen Erneuerung auf die Situation von Frauen in Vietnam*. (Schriften und Dokumente zur Politik, Wirtschaft und Kultur Vietnams, 8). Berlin: Deutsch-Vietnamesische Gesellschaft, 1997. 111 pages, DM 28.50,-. ISBN 3-929654-09-1

The literature on the problem of women in the development process is vast and growing daily. But even after having achieved greater visibility during the last twenty years, women continue to lose more than they gain in development. Despite their key role in the growing Third World economies, women have been largely by-passed in development strategies.

This is the underlying thesis of Anja Nitzsche's book. Her study, based on relevant publications and personal fieldwork, focuses on the gender-specific dimensions of the economic reform process in the rural sector of Vietnam and presents a detailed analysis of the current situation of rural Vietnamese women. It is a valuable and important contribution to research studies about women in post-communist countries. No such comprehensive representation of the actual role and status of women in rural Vietnam has existed to date, and certainly none that includes so many original, partly unpublished Vietnamese sources and interesting statistics.

The first chapter provides an essential introduction to the subject of the book: the critical correlation of the traditional role of women in socialist countries, especially the female status in Confucianist Vietnam, and the country's economic reforms in the last ten years.

As the author sets out in the beginning, there is a subtle distinction between the development process in socialist and non-socialist countries, especially concerning the often negative side effects for women, their lives, their status, their contributions to the household, the villages and the market economy, which is the main point of the book. Without doubt the political strategies of socialist countries like Vietnam have produced positive social indicators in the field of female education, health and participation in the labour market. But Nitzsche pleads for a closer look at gender roles within Vietnamese society and points out that no fundamental change in gender relations has taken place. Traditional perceptions of women are still the same, which means that - despite the political rhetoric of equality between the sexes - the female work load is significantly higher than that of men, mainly because women, besides full participation in the labour market (the basic maxim of Marxist development theory), are responsible for the family and the household.

Anja Nitzsche identifies six key areas for the analysis of the current situation of Vietnamese rural women: the position of women in the norma-

tive system of Vietnamese society, the sexual division of labour, gender-specific access to resources such as land, loans, infrastructure, technical advice and information, gender-specific effects of the economic reforms in the educational and health sector, female autonomy and structures of power in the family and patterns of female organisations.

About 80% of the population of Vietnam live in rural areas. Despite the comparatively slow economic growth in the agrarian sector since the introduction in 1986 of the 'reform process' (Doi Moi) orientated towards a free market economy, the increase in production is enormous. The acceptance of the family as an independent economic unit was one of the most important changes for the national economy. But Nitzsche illustrates that this also implied a fundamental change in the situation of rural women, especially in the northern part of Vietnam. She shows further that the transfer of state-owned land back to the family has not only produced an increase in social inequality within rural society but also has a significant impact on women's status as well as on their work load.

These aspects are the subject of the two major chapters in Anja Nitzsche's study and they provide important, sometimes unexpected, insights into the interdependencies between economic and social development. The reorientation from collective production to a household-based economy is a high motivation for families to intensify the cultivation of their land. Due to the fact that agricultural, especially manual work is considered to be women's priority, it means an increase in the female work load in the fields in addition to caring for the family. The author describes in detail the consequences for rural women of the passing of the new land law in 1993. The administrative practice is to give land use titles only to the head of the household, i.e. clearly a male person according to the Confucianist hierarchy. In the case of his death, migration or divorce, the wife runs the risk of losing the land rights because the law of succession is not yet determined and her name is not mentioned in the land title documents.

Finally, Nitzsche discusses female access to education and health services. She points out that the Confucianist influence in connection with the ongoing liberalization in Vietnam supports the trend of an alarming decline of the comparatively high educational level in former socialist Vietnam. The same can be ascertained as regards access to health services.

Anja Nitzsche's study is thoroughly researched and presented in a rational but not unemotional form. In the final discussion she formulates practical and strategic needs of rural women, arguing that the neglect of female needs in the Vietnamese development process makes women, as the most vulnerable group, the losers of development. It can already be maintained that women have suffered a decline in status, and hence their social

position has deteriorated since the economic transformations. But Nitzsche makes constructive suggestions for possible solutions. The only critique to be made here is that she does not place enough emphasis on the interpretation of the interviews made by her, which are vividly presented as a personal digression in the middle of the book. For all interested in further research of social impacts of the ongoing reform process in rural Vietnam it is a must to include gender analysis. This book is a good starting-point.

Katja Meyer

RITA LILJESTRÖM, EVA LINDSKOG, NGUYEN VAN ANG, VUONG XUAN TINH, *Profit and Poverty in Rural Vietnam: Winners and Losers of Dismantled Revolution*. (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies: Democracy in Asia Series, 3). Richmond: Curzon, 1998. XVIII, 269 pages, 60 figures, 14 tables, £40,00. ISBN 0-7007-0987-8

*Profit and Poverty in Rural Vietnam* is a very readable and rich down-to-earth-study about forestry enterprises and nearby villages in the mountains of north-western Vietnam - a region scantily represented in international social science literature. The four case studies introduce the reader to an ethnically heterogeneous social setting that is still undergoing a process of decollectivisation in which fields and forests are being privatised by granting long-term usage rights to farmers and workers. Based on a 1994-95 follow-up of a study undertaken in 1987 within the context of Swedish development aid, the case studies are introduced and summarised by Rita Liljeström, who - besides describing the methodical framework of the study - provides a general account of ethnic minorities in northern Vietnam's mountainous regions and of major changes in Vietnam's land regime after 1953.

Under the common heading of socio-economic changes due to market expansion - termed by the authors as "transition to a commodity economy" - and the various strategies people develop to cope with it, each case varies somewhat in its topical emphasis.

The first two cases exemplify the transition to a commodity economy with an emphasis on institutional arrangements, like the commodification of labour in an environment where deforestation eroded workers' livelihoods and labour is not sufficiently available for a number of households. The second case deals more extensively with socio-structural changes within the enterprise, like generational gaps, changing remuneration and retirement systems, and the fate of orphans.