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**Globalization, Gender and Work
in the Context of Economic Transition:
The Case of Vietnam**



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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the gender and poverty implications of globalisation in the context of the transition to the market economy in Vietnam. As elsewhere, the export oriented garment industry in Vietnam is a major source of employment for women. Women are also actively engaged in the domestic market, both in the formal state and private sector as well as in the informal economy. The paper uses survey data to compare the characteristics, conditions and preferences of women workers working for global and local markets in order to ascertain who they are, how they might differ and what their jobs mean to them. It finds that garment workers tended to form a distinct category of workers – young, single, with at least secondary education who have recently migrated from the country side. Women working for the local economy were far more heterogeneous and included older residents of the city with high levels of education working for the state as well as a more mixed group of women working in private wage and self employment. The findings suggest that entry into garment work represents an aspect of the diversification strategies of rural households for some women while for others, it constitutes the attempt to become more self-reliant. A higher percentage of garment workers expressed a preference for alternative forms of work than non-garment workers, a reflection of their long hours of work and exploitative working conditions. While public sector employees outside the garment sector expressed the highest levels of satisfaction with their jobs, this was not an option open to all. Instead, young women migrating from the countryside saw garment employment as an opportunity to save and take up self-employment. The paper concludes that until rural unemployment is tackled and alternative jobs made available, a female labour supply will continue to be available for the garment industry, regardless of the conditions which prevail in them.

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Globalization, Gender and Work in the Context of Economic Transition: The Case of Vietnam

Introduction: Background to the Study

This paper is concerned with the gender and poverty implications of globalisation in the context of Vietnam. There is a growing literature on these linkages as they play out countries which are moving, or have moved, from more to less regulated market economies. What is different about the Vietnamese context is that its greater integration into the global economy is occurring as one aspect of a far more fundamental change in policy regime: the transition from a centralised command economy which was dominated by the state in all spheres of social and economic life to one where there is a greater emphasis on market forces internally and externally.

In 1986, in the face of growing economic crisis, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam initiated a programme of “economic renovation”, *doi moi*, whose key goals of economic growth and social development were to be achieved through the de-collectivization of agriculture in favour of household-based production, opening up of the economy to foreign trade and investment, price liberalization, reduction of the role of the public sector and a concomitant promotion of private sector enterprise.

The economic reforms have been remarkably successful on many counts. Annual GDP growth rates rose from 2.3 percent in 1986 to 8 percent in 1989 and, until the East Asian crisis, it was one of the ten fastest growing economies in the world. Recent estimates for the period 1998-2002 suggest growth rates of 4.9 percent. As Table 1 shows, rates of growth were led by the industrial sector where value-added increased at the rate of 13.4 percent per annum between 1993 and 1997, followed by services where the rate of increase was 9 percent a year. Rates of growth were slowest in agriculture at around 4 percent.

There has also been growing integration into the global economy. Between 1992 and 1997, the rising dollar value of both imports and exports increased the share of trade in GDP from 58 percent to 86 percent. Exports performed strongly, increasing at more than 30 percent per annum after 1988 and

by the end of the 1990s, accounted for around 44 percent of GDP. While agricultural products account for a significant share of exports, its share has declined from 50 percent in 1992 to 35 percent in 1997. Export growth during this period has been led instead by light manufacturing which accounted for 14 percent of total exports in 1992 and 37 percent in 1997. Textiles and garments alone made up around 16 percent of exports in 1997.

Economic growth has not been achieved at the expense of poverty reduction. Economic reform in Vietnam took place in the context of favourable initial conditions for poverty reduction: it had a relatively egalitarian distribution of income and assets and high levels of state support for social investment meant that its levels of human development were higher than other countries at similar levels of income. Poverty has declined from around 60 percent before *doi moi* to 29 percent in 2002 (World Bank, 2003). However the decline has not been evenly distributed. While various factors such as education, household size, ethnicity and regional location all help to explain variations in current levels of poverty, the largest gap is between urban and rural areas. As a recent World Bank study estimated, “other things being equal, an urban household spends 78 percent more than a rural one. This effect dwarfs all others, including those associated with higher educational attainment” (World Bank, 2003: 23).

The reduction of poverty, rural poverty in particular, is therefore one of the major challenges facing Vietnam. With high rates of population growth in the past, it is the thirteenth largest country in the world in terms of population size. Its population was around 76.3 million in 1999 and its labour force approximately 38 million (IDRC/CIDA, 2001: 49). Although population growth has begun to decline in recent decades, previously high rates mean that each year there are around an additional million new entrants into the labour force (Dang Nguyen Anh, 2000: 67). The rural population is not only poorer than the urban population: it accounts for 70 percent of the total population and 90 percent of its poor (David Dollar and Jennie Litvack, 1998). Agriculture still accounts for a major share of total employment, but with around 1,000 persons per square kilometre of agricultural land, the farming sector is one of the most overcrowded in the world.

Central to the goal of poverty reduction, therefore, is the generation of sufficient employment, and sufficiently well-paid employment, both to reduce unemployment and underemployment, particularly in the countryside, and to absorb new entrants into the labour force. Not surprisingly,

farming is increasingly less important as a source of employment. An increasing percentage of the work force is seeking employment in various activities in the off-farm economy. Moreover, given the possibility of improving their livelihoods, many rural households have chosen to migrate, collectively or individually, to the urban areas in search of work. Before *doi moi*, migration to the cities was strictly restricted through the enforcement of a system of residential permits which required migrants to register with the municipal authorities. Restrictions on migratory movements have been considerably eased, although it is still necessary for migrants to obtain residential permits in the locality in which they now live. The urban population was around 24 percent in 1999, having grown by 46 percent since 1989.

These changing livelihood strategies help to explain the declining share of agriculture as a source of employment – from 71 percent in 1992/93 to 64 percent in 1998 to 47 percent in 2002 (cited in Patrick Belser, 2000). We see it also in the increasing percentages of the work force engaged in wage work (19 percent in 1998 and 30 percent in 2002) and in own enterprise (18 percent and 23 percent).

However, despite its strong growth performance, the industrial sector has not been the main source of this new employment. Its share of employment increased from 11 percent in 1992 to just 13 percent in 1997 compared to a rise of 17 percent to 20.5 percent in the service sector. Patrick Belser (2000) attributes the slow of employment in the industrial sector to the continued dominance of the state sector in Vietnam. Despite the on-going process of “equitization” of state enterprise, and the contraction of the public sector more generally¹, the state continues to play an important role in economic and social life. In 1998, state-owned enterprises (SOEs) accounted for 46 percent of industrial GDP compared to 32 percent by FDI and 22 percent by the domestic private sector. However, they accounted for only 24 percent of industrial employment compared to the 12 percent share contributed by FDI and 64 percent by the private sector. In other words, sheltered from both domestic and international competition and provided favoured access to capital and other resources, the state sector is far more inward-looking and capital intensive than the small, non-state industrial sector.

¹ Overall, its share of paid employment (waged/salaried) declined from 42 percent in 1998 to 31 percent in 2002 (World Bank, 2004).

The bulk of new employment opportunities has been generated in the non-state sector. The service sector has performed most strongly in this respect. Its share of total employment rose from 17 to 20.5 percent and it accounted for 57 percent of the new employment generated during this period, a great deal of it in the informal economy. Domestic private sector manufacturing has also been important. It is largely made up of small and medium enterprises, many of them household-based: according to one recent estimate, there are only 457 private domestic manufacturing units with more than 100 full time workers (MPDF, 1999).

Private sector manufacturing is far more labor intensive than the state sector: while it only accounted for 22 percent of industrial GDP in 1998, it employed 64 percent of the industrial workforce. It is also more geared to export (around 75 percent of its output) than the state (12 percent), particularly in the light manufacturing sector (Belser, 2000). The garment and textile industry lead in this sector and accounted for 16 percent of total exports in 1997. It is to this sector that we now turn.

The Growth of Export-oriented Garment Manufacturing in Vietnam

The textile and garment industry is not new in Vietnam. Prior to *doi moi*, when it was largely state owned, it had a substantial presence in the economy, producing both for the domestic market and for export to Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. It was badly affected by the collapse of these latter regimes and the uncertainties associated with economic transition. Access to the quota regulated markets of the EU in 1992 is widely perceived to have given a kick-start to the industry and it has grown impressively through much of the 1990s².

However, it is important to note that while overall growth rates for the industry were around 10.4 percent per year, the garment industry has substantially outperformed the textile with growth rates of 21.4 percent compared to 6.9 percent. The textile industry is mainly oriented to the domestic markets: only 11 percent of gross textile exports were directly exported in 1996 although textile SOE's do engage in some indirect export through the garment industry. SOEs account for a much larger share of textile production than garments. As a result of restructuring to improve competitiveness, state, there has been a reduction in the number of SOEs throughout the 1990s. Garment SOEs on the other hand have managed to insert themselves into the value chains of the

world's major garment buyers. They continue to play an important role, accounting for 33 percent of the output in garments in 1995-1999, but it is declining. The share of foreign-owned and joint venture firms is on the increase, the domestic private sector remains underdeveloped, the share of small "household enterprises" has been shrinking sharply while the co-operative sector is almost non-existent. The industry is largely concentrated in the two poles of country: the north and the south, with the majority of firms clustered around the big cities such as Hanoi, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh and Ho Chi Minh City with some in the provincial capital cities. Foreign investment has tended to largely favour the south.

The textile and garment industry is a labor intensive one and created the largest number of jobs among manufacturing industries. In 1992/93 total employment in T&G industry (both formal and informal sectors) was 1.04 million people and the figure for 1997/98 was 1.17 million. The annual growth rate for that period was 2.37 percent. Formal wage employment has increased in both absolute and relative terms. Total wage employment in T&G industry was 491.6 thousand people and 538.9 thousand in 1992/1993 and 1997/1998 respectively. Its share out of total industry employment increased from 47 percent to 54.1 percent (estimates from IDRC/CIDA 2001).

The domestic private sector makes up the majority of total employment in both textile and garment industry, followed by state sector. Foreign-owned enterprises generate the smallest number of jobs. Household enterprises, which dominate the domestic private, are very small in size, and much smaller than SOEs and foreign invested firms. In terms of employment per establishment, SOE is the largest with size being 2.6 times and 2.2 times bigger than the average foreign firm in textile and garment industry respectively.

Although the garment and textile industries tend to be treated as one industry for purposes of official data collection and in a number of studies, it can be seen from our description that they have had very different trajectories in the course of the country's integration into the global economy. The garment sector has grown far more rapidly than the textile and it is far more oriented to the global market. It is also the more labour intensive of the two, as the machinery used in textile production tends to be more advanced. Employment gains and losses have consequently been very

² Thanks to quota allocations for the EU, Vietnamese T&G exports to the EU rose from US\$ 250 million in 1993 to US\$ 650 million in 1998 (Vu *et al.*, 2001b). In Japan, where Vietnam operates in an 'unrestricted' environment, it

different in the two sectors. Restructuring of state owned textile enterprises has led to a decline by almost a third of overall textile work force in the course of the 1990s. This has been accompanied, on the other hand, by an even greater rise in garment employment, in both state and even more in the private sector (GSO, 2000; GSO, 2001). The rise in garment employment is even more striking using the population census statistics for 1989 and 1999 which suggests that garment household employment is not fully recorded by some sources.

There is also some difference in the kind of workers the two industries employ. A survey of both textile and garment workers found that 51 percent of workers had completed lower secondary education and 38 percent had completed upper secondary. However, it was noted that the textile industry employed a somewhat more educated work force than the garment industry, partly because it utilised more advanced technology. Furthermore, the garment industry (in line with export garment manufacturing in much of the rest of the world) employed more women in its workforce. As a result, the increase in its share of employment in the T&G industry in the course of the 1990s has led to an increase in the percentage of women among its wage workers: from 77 percent in 1992 to 80 percent in 1998.

To sum, therefore, the focus in this study is on a sector of the Vietnamese industry which has led its integration into the global economy. Not only has the garment industry made a major contribution to industrial growth and export earnings in the country, it is also likely to be a source of employment to the less skilled and hence poorer, sections of the labour force. It is thus crucial to the development of the country for the foreseeable future, both in terms of its contribution to economic growth and export earnings, but also to poverty reduction through employment generation. Furthermore, and in line with the pattern in other parts of the world, export-oriented garment manufacturing in Vietnam draws on a largely female labour force. It is the implications of employment for this female labour force that is the focus of this paper. However, we need to locate our analysis of these implications in the broader context of gender and poverty in Vietnam and it is to this we now turn.

Gender, Work and Poverty in Vietnam

has also enjoyed significant export growth.

Gender relations in Vietnam do not take the extreme forms of inequalities in life expectancy, health, nutrition, employment and freedom of movement that are to be found in some other parts of the developing world. In terms of GDI, it ranked 89 out of 173 countries in 2004, higher than many countries with higher levels of per capita GNP. Its gender norms and practices suggest that Vietnam fits more easily into the more gender-egalitarian cultural traditions of South-east Asia than the stronger patriarchal culture of East or South Asia (Naila Kabeer, 2003). Historically, rural women in Vietnam have always worked in the fields and played a dominant role in trade (Nguyen Tu Chi, 1991; Francois Houtart and Genevieve Lemercinier, 1984). The significance of women's economic activities has been confirmed by more recent data (David Dollar and Jennie Litvack, 1998; Jaikishan Desai, 1995 and Monica Fong, 1994). According to the latest VLSS, 85 percent of men and 83 percent of women between the ages of 15-60 were economically active (World Bank 2003).

However, asymmetries in the gender distribution of roles and responsibilities do give rise to certain patterns of inequality. Most importantly, women undertake a far greater share of domestic work and child care than men. In the pre-reform period, the agricultural co-operative system provided free access to various services such as child care, education, health care and collective use of agricultural machinery. With the collapse of the system since economic reform, women's reproductive work loads have increased. Data from the first VLSS suggested that men worked around 150 more hours a year than women outside the home but once women's domestic chores within the home were taken into account, they worked longer hours than men and enjoyed less leisure, except in the over 60 age group (Jaikishan Desai, 1995). Studies by the Centre for Family and Women's Studies and the National Economics University estimated that rural women worked around eleven hours a day and 302-339 days a year while men worked seven hours a day and 222-275 days a year.

The demands of domestic work on women's time constrain the amount of time they can devote to other productive activities, the range of economic activities open to them as well as returns to their labour effort. Women are concentrated in rural areas, and in the agricultural sector than men, and they are far more likely than men to be found in self-employment than in waged employment. According to the 1997-98 VLSS, 65 percent of the female work force and 58 percent of the male were engaged in own farming, 20 percent of women and 17 percent of men were to be found in off-farm self-employment, 24 percent of men and 15 percent of women were to be found in waged/salaried employment more generally.

Women also earn less than men in various forms of wage labour: around 62 percent of men's wages in the agricultural sector, and 72 percent overall. Differential wages have been partly attributed to differences in experience and schooling, but as elsewhere, it also reflects the assignment of women to lower-value added tasks and activities. Women's wages were found to be less elastic with respect to differences in schooling (at over 9 years of schooling) than men's (Jaikishan Desai, 1995) while Vijverberg (1998) found returns to women's self-employed activities were lower than those of men, even if differences in education, productive assets, age, region and age of enterprise were controlled for.

These restrictions on women's economic options have implications for household poverty. Van Tiem noted that there was considerable underemployment among women in the countryside: 30 percent in the country as a whole and 50 percent in the Red River delta. The problem for Vietnamese women has therefore been summarised as one of "overwork but underemployment" (Monica Fong, 1994). Our own study of rural households in the Mekong delta and the Red River Delta found that the prosperity of rural households in both locations depended, along with size of landholdings and other assets, on the ability of its members, women as much as men, to diversify into off-farm activities (Naila Kabeer and Tran Thi Van Anh, 2000 and 2002). The poorest households in both our study locations proved to be those who had failed to achieve such diversification.

Our study found that gender was an important factor in mediating this relationship between diversification and poverty. In the north of Vietnam, where there was almost no landlessness, the poorest households were those where women remained concentrated in rice and subsistence crop farming. In the south, where a large percentage of households covered by the study were landless (a characteristic of the south of Vietnam in general), the poorest households were those where women had only been able to diversify into agricultural wage labour. As respondents interviewed as part of the study pointed out, unlike men who could easily migrate in the slack season to search for work in other rural areas or in towns as carpenters, builders, cyclo drivers, traders etc, women's responsibilities in the family and on the farm meant that they were "tied to the village bamboo groves". However, young single women are not constrained in the same way and can and do

migrate. A study of female migrants found that there has been an increase in migration among this group since *doi moi*, many because they hoped for a better life in the city (Dang Nguyen Anh, 2000).

In urban areas too, economic activity rates are high among both women and men but women experience greater disadvantages in the labour market than men. Around 20 percent of the male workforce and 10 percent of the female are employed in the formal sector. Of such employment, around 50 percent are in the private sector while 41 percent are in the state owned sector. Formal employment, particularly with the state, offers the greater security of employment and better wages than the rest of the economy. The World Bank report cited earlier found that, holding other household characteristics constant, a household with a wage earner in the private sector reported a 3 percent increase in its per capita expenditure while one with a wage earner in public employment reported a 13 percent increase. Dang Nguyen Anh's study of female migrants also found that women in state sector employment earned significantly more than those in self-employment, particularly if they were longer term migrants.

However, jobs in the state sector are declining: between 1992-96, the non-state sector generated 5.2 million new jobs while jobs in the state sector declined by 1.3 million (MOLISA, 1998 cited in Dang Nguyen Anh, 2000). The retrenchment of the state and co-operative sector in the context of economic reform hit women harder than men, both in absolute terms (550,000 women lost their jobs in 1990-92 compared to 300,000 men) but also in relative terms, because SOE employment represented a much larger share of wage employment among women. Retrenched workers had to move from the relative secure wage and salary employment provided by the state to often more remunerative, but generally less secure work in the private sector, both formal and informal. Women are believed to represent around 70-80 percent of the workforce in the informal economy. Between 1991 and 1996, the number of private enterprises, including large, medium and small scale, increased four-fold. Clearly, some of this increase can be traced to the growth of the export garment sector.

Thus, while public sector employment may continue to be highly valued in the Vietnamese context, it is a shrinking source of employment. For most poorer households in urban areas, getting waged employment of any kind, is an important route out of poverty. Migrants tend to be at a particular disadvantage in obtaining jobs, particular when they have only temporary or no residential status (Ha Thi Phoung Tien and Ha Quang Ngoc, 2001). A study of female migrants found strong competition

for low-paid jobs, particularly in the larger cities, because of the continued influx from the countryside and smaller towns. Most female migrants ended up in self-employment or wage employment where they do not only earn less than women who were long term residents of the city but also considerably less than their temporary migrant male counterparts. As we shall see, a significant percentage of those who take up waged employment do so in the export garment industry.

Research Questions and Methodology

It is these women who are the main focus of this paper. We are interested in assessing the gender and poverty implications of their incorporation into an industry that has not only grown rapidly in the country's transition to a market economy, but is also one of the most visible manifestations of globalisation in the country. We will carry out this assessment through a comparison of women working in the export garment industry and a "control" group of women working for the domestic economy. We will be asking who these two groups of women were, where they came from, why they took up these jobs, how their working conditions compared and what their jobs meant to them. This will allow us to make some tentative conclusions about how women workers working for global and domestic markets fared in the course of Vietnam's integration into the global economy and whether there were any clear-cut "winners" or "losers" among them.

However, we need to draw attention to one particularity of the situation in Vietnam which has to be taken into account in our analysis. Attempts to assess the implications of women's employment in export-oriented manufacturing carried out elsewhere in the developing world have tended to be unfavourable when the comparison is between the casualised conditions which prevail in this sector globally and the conditions which prevailed in an earlier era of state regulation when formal sector employment, largely dominated by men, was characterised by high levels of social protection (Guy Standing, 1999). They tend to be less unfavourable when the comparison is with other forms of unregulated and casualised forms of employment, generally in the informal economy, in which women tended, and continue, to predominate (Naila Kabeer, 2000; Linda Lim, 1990; Fiona Wilson, 1991).

However, the comparison is complicated in the case of a transitional economy like Vietnam by the continued presence of the state throughout the economy, including in its domestic as well as export

sector. As we noted earlier, state-owned garment factories had existed in the pre-reform period producing mainly for the East European and domestic market but they have now diversified into production for global market, along with a range of privately owned enterprises. Since public sector employment continues to be associated with greater security of employment and better working conditions, state ownership of export garment factories may help to offset some of the conditions typically associated with global competition in a low-cost, labour-intensive industry. Alternatively, of course, the need to compete in this sector of the global economy may give state employment in the export garment sector many of the characteristics of employment associated with export garment manufacturing in other parts of the world. We will explore these possibilities in the course of the paper.

The data reported in this paper comes from a survey carried out in 2001 of 1202 women workers and their households, evenly divided between Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi where much of the export garment industry is located. 604 of the women in the sample worked in the export garment industry. The remaining 598 women were selected on the basis that they worked in occupations which were oriented to the domestic market. They were drawn from the same residential neighbourhoods in which the garment workers were located in order to ensure some degree of similarity in the socio-economic conditions of the two groups. However, it should be noted, that in the context of Vietnam, which had, and continues to have, a relatively egalitarian society, neighbourhoods are not as economically segregated as urban contexts in more stratified societies. Consequently, our sample of non-garment workers displayed much greater socio-economic heterogeneity than had been expected in opting for this approach to sample selection.

The survey instruments for the two categories of workers collected common information on their backgrounds, individual and household characteristics and working conditions but varied in the way some of the questions were phrased in order to capture more detail on the garment workers. A number of open-ended questions were also included in the survey instrument in order to allow a greater amount of qualitative information to be collected than is normally the case with survey questionnaires.

The analysis in this paper is based on a three-stage comparison of the two different categories of workers in our survey. The first stage is a comparison of the socio-economic characteristics of the

workers and their households in order to establish who they were and where they came from. The second stage uses some “objective” criteria to evaluate the quality of employment generated by export-oriented activities relative to activities geared to the local economy. The third stage draws on the workers’ own views to carry out a more subjectively based evaluation. The concluding sections of the paper draws together the findings from the different stages of analysis in order to reflect on what they tell us about the costs and benefits of globalisation for some of Vietnam’s working women.

1. Characteristics of Women Workers in the Traded and Non-traded Sectors

Occupational profiles

We begin our analysis with a description of the economic activities of the women workers in our sample. Table 2 provides a break-down of the form of enterprise in which the workers in our two categories worked. It shows that 35 percent of the garment workers worked in state-owned enterprises (SOEs), with an additional 4 percent in a joint venture enterprise with the state. The rest worked in the private sector: 39 percent worked for locally owned companies, 5 percent worked in a private sector joint venture, 3 percent worked in co-operatives while 13 percent worked in small household-based enterprises. We can therefore divide the category of garment workers into two sub-categories: those who worked for the state (39 percent) and those who worked in the private sector (61 percent). The majority of garment workers in our sample were involved in production, more specifically machining but also packing, ironing, finishing and cutting. There were also a small number of quality controllers.

As far as non-garment workers were concerned, that 28 percent worked for the state, 29 percent worked in the private sector while 43 percent were self-employed. Table 3 reports on the different kinds of activities in which workers in this category were engaged. The heterogeneity referred to earlier as far as our non-garment worker sample is evident from the fact that it consisted of a much wider range of sectors, activities and forms of engagement. Self-employed women in various forms of micro-enterprise and own-account trading accounted for the highest percentage of workers in this group (24 percent). They were followed by women in salaried government employment (17 percent), factory wage workers (9 percent), who were evenly divided between state and private enterprise, and private salaried employees (7 percent). The rest were distributed between a variety of self-employed or privately employed service providers (such as hairdressing, tuition and so on) and producers

(including tailoring). Thus of the non-garment workers, 28 percent were employed by the state, 29 percent were in various forms of private employment and 43 percent were self-employed, including some who employed others.

In our analysis, we will be distinguishing between the two broad *categories* of workers – garment and non-garment workers – and five *sub-categories*: garment workers in the state sector; garment workers in the private sector; non-garment employees of the state; private sector wage workers and private sector self-employed. Table 4 compares the size of the units in which these sub-categories were employed. It shows that garment workers generally worked in far larger enterprises than non-garment workers. Among garment workers, private sector garment workers were employed in smaller units ranging from 10 to 300 employees while state workers were to be found in enterprises which employed between 500 and 7000 employees. Among the non-garment workers, the self-employed were most likely to be found at the smaller end of the scale: 62 percent worked in units with around 1-5 workers compared to only 40 percent of wage workers. Indeed, 32 percent of self-employed women worked entirely on their own, a unit of one. At the same time, 11 percent of self-employed women worked in units of six and more workers and are likely to have been employers rather than employees.

Demography, migration and living arrangements of workers

Tables 5a, b and c provide information on the demographic characteristics, migration history and current living arrangements of the workers in our sample while Table 6 reports on the past occupational history. It is immediately clear from these tables that our two categories of workers differed from each other in a number of important ways. First of all, they were at different stages of their life course. The garment workers were generally younger – mean age was 27 for state garment workers and 24 for privately employed ones. They were also overwhelmingly single, particularly the privately employed ones, and very few reported having any children. The non-garment workers, on the other hand, were in their early thirties, more likely to be married than the garment workers and therefore more likely to have children. However, there was greater variation *within* this group in a number of respects. Privately employed wage workers were somewhat younger (mean age of 32 compared to 35 for state employees) and far more likely to be single, divorced or widowed and without children than both state employees and the self-employed. The self-employed were most likely to have children.

Differences in the age groups from which the two groups of workers were drawn were also reflected in their occupational histories. As the older cohort, non-garment workers had been working for many more years than the garment workers: an average of 14-15 years compared to 7-8 years. Thus most of them had begun their working lives before or at the beginning of *doi moi* at a time when the state dominated the economy, and employment in the state sector implied a job for life. However, migration at that time had been strictly restricted through the enforcement of a system of residential permits which required all migrants to register with the municipal authorities. The main channels for rural-urban migration were recruitment into state employment. Since only a minority of rural women were recruited into state employment – the bulk were concentrated in the agricultural sector – women’s migration was mainly confined to those who were married to husbands who took up government jobs into the city (Dang Nguyen Anh, 2000). Restrictions on migratory movements have been considerably eased since *doi moi*, but it is still necessary for migrants to obtain residential permits in the locality they move into. This process takes time but is essential to gain access to various state benefits in the city, including state sector employment, social services and housing.

This explains why state employees outside the garment sector were more likely to be permanent residents of the city: 56 percent appear to have been born in the city while others had migrated an average of 15 years ago. As Table 6 shows, around 56 percent of women in this sub-category had started their working lives in state employment. Migration was considerably higher among private sector non-garment workers and a higher percentage were temporary or unregistered migrant status. Their more recent arrival in the city meant that many more of them had started out in farming than state employed workers. Of the rest, privately employed wage workers were more likely to have begun out in wage work while self-employed women were more likely to have begun out in self employment. However, around 5 percent of wage workers and 9 percent of self-employed women had started out in the state sector. It is likely that they were among those who had been retrenched as a result of the downsizing of the state sector.

As a category, non-garment workers who had migrated gave the search for work as the main reason for migration, but those working for the state were more likely than the rest to have come for educational and other purposes. Of possible reasons given for taking up their current employment (Table 7a), state sector employees were more likely than the rest to say that it was either because

they liked the job or because it utilised their skills and qualifications. The reasons given by private sector non-garment workers were more evenly divided between liking the work/finding it suitable and needing the money to survive or improve their standard of living. This suggests that they were likely to come from poorer households than state employees.

Turning to the garment workers, most had begun work an average of 7-8 years ago, by which time, economic reform was well underway, the economy had diversified considerably, private sector enterprise had begun to grow and administrative controls over migration had been considerably relaxed. They were clearly made up of women who had taken advantage of this relaxation to migrate into the city, mainly from rural areas but also from some smaller provincial towns. The vast majority were recent migrants, having lived in the city for an average of around 4-6 years in the city. Most did not have permanent residential status while a significant minority, mainly among those working in the private sector, were unregistered. While over 80 percent joined the garment industry after 1992, when the export sector took off, 60 percent of private sector workers and 40 percent of state workers had joined in the last 3 years.

As Table 6 suggests, around 50 percent of both garment workers working for the state and those working for private enterprise, reported garment employment to be their first experience of paid work. 18 percent of the rest had begun out as unpaid family workers on farms or household enterprises, 10% as self-employed workers and 18 percent as casual wage workers. These jobs give us some idea of the kind of alternative forms of employment that had been, or were, available to garment workers outside the industry. The overwhelming reason for migration by those who had migrated was the search for work. This was supported by their responses to a question asking their reason for taking up garment work.

In contrast to the questionnaire for the non-garment workers, who were given a number of pre-determined responses to choose from, the questionnaire for the garment workers allowed open-ended answers to this question so we were able to get a relatively detailed account of why this category of workers had opted for garment employment. These are reported in Table 7b. Around 21-27 percent related their choice to the limited options they faced in their previous location: either there was no work available in their villages or small towns, or the work (particularly farming)

entailed hard physical labour or, the case of both farming and self-employment, offered poor or irregular returns:

I found hard to earn money for living in the countryside, so I went to the city to find a job.

I myself like garment work and have an aptitude for doing it.

Garment job is less hard than farming work at home

*Because there's no work for me to do in the countryside
and I like garment job.*

*I was unable to find customers. I get at least a minimum wage in
garment job.*

*Being a housemaid did not bring me much money. I need a stable job
I want to get out of farm work and I couldn't find job in my countryside*

*I found difficult to have enough income by doing farm work or other work in my countryside so I went to employment
center to look for job*

I couldn't find job in my countryside

*Life depends on farming in my countryside which is very hard so I want to find job in the city to earn money for myself
and my family. This work is suitable to my knowledge and ability*

I want to get out of farm work

Around 21-24 percent said that they took it up because they “liked” the work while another 14-21 percent said that it utilised their skills and qualifications in a way that farming and off-farm enterprises did not.

I like garment job. I don't have to work outside (ie. in the sun)

I like garment job. I can earn money to help my family

I myself like garment work and have an aptitude for doing it.

I can not earn enough money from farming in my hometown. Garment job does not require high skills

I like garment job, especially fashion design

I want to earn some money to help my family

I want to earn money for living

I myself like garment work and have an aptitude for doing it.

I can not earn enough money from farming in my hometown. Garment job does not require high skills

I like garment job, especially fashion design

I need a job to have a stable income. I could sew before

I like garment job. It's simple. I don't have to work outside house. It does not require high education level

Other important reasons for taking up garment work related to characteristics of the income earned (it was considered high or regular), because it was easy to get into, and because it contributed economically to their own or to their family's needs.

We turn next to the living arrangements of the workers in our sample. In order to capture the fluidity of household boundaries likely to characterise a sample of workers with high levels of migration, we classified their households into two categories. "Unified" households were made up of those in which all family members considered to belong to the same household lived together and shared resources while "divided" households were made up of family members who were

residentially separated, but considered themselves as belonging to the same household and, in many cases, pooling some budgetary resources. The existence of this latter category meant that in attempting to assess household-level characteristics, we had to differentiate between workers' current residential arrangements and the households that they belonged to.

Higher levels of migration among garment workers, particularly among private sector garment workers, meant that much higher percentages of them came from "divided households." In most cases, they had left behind in the countryside when they had migrated into the city although in some cases, women were separated from husbands who might be working in another city. Very few of these women lived entirely on their own. Most shared accommodation with friends, acquaintances, co-workers and "others".

By contrast, a much higher percentage of non-garment workers, who were more likely to be long-term residents of the city, lived in unified households, with state employees reporting the highest percentages. They were also more likely as a group to live with husbands or parents rather than the more miscellaneous category of co-residents reported by the garment workers. State employees, in particular, were most likely to report living with husbands. As we have noted, this group along with self-employed women were the most likely to be married.

Socio-economic characteristics of workers and their households

Table 8 examines various socio-economic characteristics of the workers in our sample to find out if different sub-categories of workers were drawn from different strata of society. Starting with their education levels, it is clear that state employees outside the garment sector, many of whom were in professional and administrative jobs, had the highest levels of education of the five sub-categories of workers: 78 percent had 10+ years of education. Garment workers as a category had the next highest levels of education, with those in SOE reporting somewhat higher levels than those in private enterprise: 48 percent of the former had 10+ years of education compared to 37 percent of the latter. Most of the rest had some level of secondary education. Private sector workers outside the garment industry reported greater variation in their education levels, attesting to the heterogeneity of this group. 19 percent of private sector wage workers and 16 percent of the self employment had 5 or less years of education (compared to negligible percentages in the other sub-categories), 41 percent and 46 percent had 5-10 years of education while 41 percent and 39 percent

had more than 10 years of education, i.e. similar to the garment workers but not as high as non-garment state employees. It appears therefore that while some of the women working in the private sector outside the garment industry have education levels equivalent to those of the garment workers, a very much higher percentage have much lower levels of education.

Given that education levels are generally lower in the countryside than in the towns, and that most garment workers are recent migrants from the countryside, their higher levels of education than workers elsewhere in private sector suggests that the garment industry may be recruiting from the better off sections of the rural female labour force. On the other hand, the higher levels of education among garment workers may also be a cohort effect, reflecting their younger ages relative to other workers and the expansion of secondary and higher education in recent years.

Some support for the latter explanation is suggested by information on the education of household head. Excluding households which were headed by the respondents themselves, we find that the education levels of household heads were generally lower among private sector garment workers than other sub-categories. Heads of households of state employees outside the garment sector reported much higher levels of education than other sub-categories. Heads in this category were also the most likely of all sub-categories to have themselves worked for the state, further evidence that they came from better-off households than the rest. Garment workers, on the other hand, were more likely to report household heads who engaged in farming than the rest of the workers in our sample, with private sector garment workers reporting the highest percentages of heads engaged in farming.

Straightforward comparisons of household characteristics are difficult because recent migrants were more likely than the rest to belong to households that were located elsewhere. Any attempt to assess socio-economic differences between different sub-categories of workers based on household-based indicators would have to take this into account. Consequently, in Table 8, we report on the socio-economic indicators for workers' current households and consider socio-economic indicators for households left behind separately in Table 9. Table 8 suggests that higher percentages of garment workers in general, and private sector garment workers in particular, lived in privately rented accommodation compared to non-garment workers. This is to be expected, given the higher percentages of the former category who had arrived recently in the city. As temporary or

unregistered migrants, who generally have problems finding decent housing, they also lived in far more crowded accommodation than non-garment workers (number of co-residents per sq meter of housing), with garment workers in the private sector reporting the most crowded. Among non-garment workers, state employees reported the least crowded accommodation of all groups while privately employed wage workers reported the most crowded. A higher percentage of garment workers, particularly those in private enterprise, cooked with kerosene or coal, inferior forms of fuel compared to gas and electricity, again a possible reflection of their unregistered status and the difficulties of getting municipal services. Among non-garment workers, wage workers in the private sector were more likely to cook with inferior forms of fuel than the other sub-categories.

Garment workers also reported owning/sharing fewer assets than non-garment workers, with private sector workers generally owning fewer assets than those in the SOEs. Among non-garment workers also, state employees reported owning/sharing more assets than women working in the private sector. Differences among waged workers and self-employed women in the private sector were not large but where they existed, wage workers generally reported fewer assets than the self-employed.

Garment workers, even those in SOEs, were more likely to have experienced some food shortage in the previous year than non-garment workers - with the exception of the wage workers among the latter group. Ability to save did not vary systematically between different sub-categories of workers, but amounts saved by those who managed to save were lower among garment workers.

A far smaller percentage of workers received remittances from family members located elsewhere compared to percentages sending remittances. The percentages receiving remittances varied between 16 percent among garment workers in SOEs to 11 percent among the self-employed. However, only 2-5 percent received an amount that exceeded 25 percent of their income. Private sector garment workers were the most likely to be sending remittances (51 percent), followed by state sector garment workers and the self-employed (36 percent), other private sector wage workers (31 percent) and non-garment state employees (19 percent). Private sector garment workers also sent a proportionately greater share of their income than the rest: 23 percent send more than a quarter of their income home compared to 18 percent of the self-employed, 15 percent of non-garment wage

workers, 13 percent of state-employed garment workers and just 5 percent of non-garment state employees.

Table 9 reports only on women workers from divided households in order to see how they compare with the overall sample. Because only 25 out of the 167 women who were employed by the state outside the garment sector reported such divided membership, they have been omitted from the table. It is evident from the mean number of years spent in the city by women workers from divided households compared to the all workers in each sub-category that they are among the most recent migrants in each sub-category.

In particular, it is picking up the more recent migrants among the more settled sub-categories of workers. Thus while the mean number of years lived in the city by self-employed women overall was around 11 years, it was 7 years among those from divided households.

Garment workers, particularly those working for the private sector, are the most recent migrants in this group, with an average of 3.5-4.5 years in the city, and private sector garment workers contain the highest percentage of unregistered migrants. However, by a number of criteria (workers' education, heads' education, residency status) it appeared while self-employed women from divided households were the most disadvantaged in our overall sample of workers. They had lower levels of education than self employed women from unified households as well as than other sub-categories of workers belonging to divided households. They also had a higher percentage of household heads with primary or less education than the other sub-categories. The families they had left behind owned fewer assets than the families of other workers from divided households and were more likely to have experienced a period of food shortage. And given that they had been in the city longer than the rest, they had a high percentage of unregistered migrants among them.

This suggests that among the more recent female migrants to the city, those who had arrived in the last 5 or 6 years, the poorest and least well educated were to be found in various forms of self-employment, rather than in waged employment, many of them in own-account work (28 percent). The more educated took up waged employment in state owned garment enterprises. Of the rest, recent migrants tended to take up waged work in privately owned garment enterprises while those

who had been in the city longer, and were therefore, more likely to be registered, took up waged work in other forms of private enterprise.

Summary

Our analysis suggests that garment workers differed from the non-garment workers in a number of important ways. They were younger, more likely to be single and without children. The vast majority had migrated very recently from the rural areas, explicitly in search of work, often on their own, and many had only temporary or no residential status. Consequently, they were less likely than non-garment workers to live in unified family-based households with parents and husbands and more likely to live in temporary arrangements with co-workers, friends, acquaintances and other relatives. Non-garment workers were generally older and more likely to be married than garment workers, but there was some variation among them. State employees were, on average, older, had lived longer in the city and were more likely to have permanent residential status than the rest. Private wage workers, on the other hand, were somewhat younger, more likely to be single and without children than other sub-categories in this category and to have migrated more recently.

Socio-economic differentials between garment and non-garment workers were less clear cut. State employees outside the garment sector were the most educated sub-category of workers in our sample and also the most advantaged group by various socio-economic indicators. Of the rest, garment workers were generally more educated as a group. This may have been a cohort effect because, by a number of criteria, they appeared to belong to less advantaged households than these other workers. Privately employed garment workers appeared to constitute the least advantaged of all five sub-group in our sample, performing as badly or worse than other groups by most of our indicators of disadvantage: education of head of household, percentages migrating on their own, experience of food shortage, kind of fuel used, crowded living space and so on. While garment workers as a group had a higher percentage of temporary migrants than non garment workers, private sector garment workers had the highest percentage of unregistered migrants.

A different picture emerged, however, when we focused only on those workers in each sub-category who reported divided households. These were mainly women who migrated in the last 5 or 6 years into the city, leaving their families behind. Excluding non-garment state employees, very few of whom fell into this category, these women tended to constitute the less well off section in each sub-category. Those among them with higher levels of education took up employment in the state-owned garment enterprises while the poorest and least well-educated took up various forms of self-employment, around 28 percent working on their own. The rest either worked in private sector

garment employment if they were recent migrants or in other forms of private sector waged work if they had come to the city earlier.

2. Assessing the Quality of Employment in Traded and Non-traded Sectors: the “Objective” Perspective

Given that the overwhelming majority of the garment workers in our sample had migrated into the city in search of work from rural backgrounds where households were generally poorer and levels of unemployment/underemployment, particularly for women, higher than in urban areas, it could be said that they were the direct beneficiaries from the new employment opportunities generated by the globalisation of the garment industry. The number of jobs generated by the industry can thus be seen a quantitative measure of some of the benefits generated by globalisation.

However, we are also interested in the “qualitative” dimension of these benefits. In this and the following section, we will explore these by comparing the positive and negative aspects of these new forms of employment for women with older forms located in the non-traded sector, using objective as well as subjective criteria. By “objective” criteria, we are referring to various predetermined measures of the quality of employment. Three sets of such criteria will be discussed in this section. The first relates to the country’s Labour Code which specifies the broad regulatory framework governing relations between employers and employees. The second relates to labour contracts which spell out the more detailed terms and conditions agreed between specific employers and employees. The third relates to the actual terms and conditions reported by workers in each sub-category. Section 4 will explore the quality of employment generated by globalisation using “subjective” criteria by which we mean the workers’ own evaluations.

Formal terms and conditions: Labour code and labour contracts

The Labour Code in Vietnam was formulated in 1994 to take account of growing number of private employers in an economy which had till then been dominated by state enterprise. It is extremely comprehensive, particularly in relation to women employees, to whom 17 articles of the Code are devoted. Table 10 reports on workers’ knowledge about the existence of the Labour Code and its various provisions. Given that the Code relates primarily to employed workers, it is not surprising that only 15 percent of the self-employed knew of its existence. They are likely to have been the employers among this group. Nor is it surprising that a much higher percentage of state employees, both within and outside the garment sector, (over 70 percent) knew of its existence. Of private

sector waged employees, 44 percent of those in the garment sector and 20 percent of the rest had heard of the Labour Code, although the Code is in principle applicable to even casual wage workers (Collins and Zhu), the majority of workers who knew about the Labour Code had heard about it from their employers or their trade union.

The data reported in the rest of the table was calculated only for those workers who had heard of the Code. 62 percent of state employees outside the garment sector who had heard of the Code knew of the minimum wage requirement compared to around 50 percent of garment workers in both SOEs and private enterprises, and just 40 percent of other private sector workers. Of various items covered by the labour code, all groups gave timely repayments the highest priority, although interestingly, the percentage was highest among garment workers in private enterprises, suggesting that they were most likely to experience problems in this area. Except for privately employed garment workers, who prioritised overtime pay, all other sub-categories ranked social insurance second highest in priority. Once again, this draws attention to the importance of the “time factor” among privately employed garment workers. State garment workers ranked overtime pay provision as the third most important provision while private garment workers ranked social insurance third in priority. Other state employees and self-employed women (who were more likely to have children) ranked maternity leave third in importance while other private wage workers ranked over time. Thus, timeliness of payment, overtime pay, social insurance and maternity leave emerged as the most important items in the Labour Code by those who had heard of it.

Finally, of the percentages of workers who had heard of the Labour Code, 86 percent of state employees outside the garment sector considered that it was being observed in their work place compared to just 24 percent of state employed garment workers while similar percentages of garment and non-garment wage workers considered this to be the case (16 percent). However, we are talking about only 4 workers in the latter case.

We turn next to labour contracts reported by different groups of workers. At this stage of the analysis, we will be excluding self-employed women since issues relating to the labour contract was not relevant to most of them since, except for a small minority, most of them either worked on their own or with other family members. The percentages of the four sub-categories of workers included in Table 11 who reported labour contracts at work varied between a high of around 95-98 percent of

state-employed workers in both the garment and non-garment sector, 85 percent among privately employed garment workers and 53 percent of privately employed wage workers. This suggests that many of this latter group probably worked in the unregistered economy. Almost all state employees who reported labour contracts had written contracts but only 77 percent of privately employed garment workers with contracts had written contracts while only 48 percent of the even smaller percentage of other privately employed wage workers had written contracts.

The length of the period covered by the contract determines security of employment as well as access to other benefits. Within the garment sector, around 5 percent of state-employed wage workers in the garment sector were on pay lists (life long contracts) while 22 percent were on long term contracts. The rest were on contracts of varying duration including 5 percent on 6 month contracts, 36 percent on one year contracts, 13 percent on two year contracts and 12 percent on 3 year contracts. Only 2 percent did not know the duration of their contract. Of privately employed garment workers, 11 percent did not know the duration of their contract, 12 percent had a long term contract, while the rest had contracts of varying duration, including 10 percent on 6 month contracts, 34 percent on one year contracts, 8 percent on two year contracts and 16 percent on 3 year contracts.

Outside the garment sector, 29 percent of state employees were on the “pay list” and 26 percent were on long term contracts. The rest were on fixed term contracts of varying duration, including 24 percent on one year contracts. None of the privately employed wage workers were on the pay list, but 31 percent were on long term contracts. The rest either did not know (21 percent) or had contracts of varying fixed term duration, including around 25 percent on one year contracts.

In terms of coverage, contracts in the state sector covered a much wider range of issues than those in the private sector, while within the private sector, contracts in the garment industry had more comprehensive coverage than workers in the rest of the economy. On the basis of their contracts, we can conclude that the state sector offered more stable employment to its employees, regardless of which sector they worked in, as well as wide coverage but that state contracts were more favourable outside the garment sector than within it. The private sector generally offered less stable employment and fewer benefits but here conditions were more favourable for private sector workers within the garment industry than outside it

Actual terms and conditions: pay, hours and security

The Labour Code specifies the formal regulatory framework governing relations between employers and employees in Vietnam while labour contracts, where they exist, provide us with information on what has been agreed between specific employers and employees. However, neither necessarily tell us a great deal about actual practices at work since the Labour Code is generally more relevant to employed than to self-employed workers and, in any case, there is no guarantee that either Code or contract will be fully, or even partially, implemented. We therefore turn to Tables 12 a, b and c which report on the actual terms and conditions prevailing at work.

Table 12a reports on those terms and conditions which were relevant to all groups of workers, regardless of their working status, viz: returns to labour and hours of work. It suggests that garment workers in general, and private sector garment workers in particular, earned lower levels of monthly income than workers in the rest of the economy, including wage workers and the self employed in the private sector. Educational qualifications clearly do not explain wage differentials between different sub-categories of workers since self-employed women report the highest average (and maximum) earnings per month but, as we noted earlier, had some of the least educated workers. As we noted earlier, this is a very heterogeneous group of women and it is likely that it has greater internal variation in earnings.³

Garment workers also report longer working days than workers in the rest of the economy, followed by self-employed women who also took the fewest holidays in the month. Only state employees outside the garment sector reported the “normal” working day laid down by the law of eight hours. Information on periods without work suggests that different groups of workers experienced different kinds of insecurity. A higher percentage of garment workers reported being without work in 2001 at least once or twice for periods which of around 10 days: some had left voluntarily in search of higher pay or better conditions in a different factory, others were without work because the company did not have new orders or because the contract they had been working on was

³ A comparison of wages of workers from divided and unified households in each sub-group reinforced the point that this is a very heterogenous group of workers. While workers from “divided” households earned less than workers from unified households for all sub-categories of workers, their wages as a percentage of the wages of workers from unified households varied from 79 percent in the garment industry to 65 percent among private sector self-employed.

completed. While much lower percentages of other privately employed workers and self-employed women were without work in the previous year, interruptions to work for these groups was more frequent.

Table 12b reports on further aspects of the “quality” of working conditions, but focuses on various benefits at work which are relevant mainly to employed workers. The self-employed have consequently been excluded from this stage of the analysis. The results of this table suggest that state employees generally enjoy more benefits than private employees but among private employees, garment workers enjoy a higher level of benefits than wage workers outside the garment industry. Given the importance given to social insurance by all groups of workers, it is worth noting that garment workers in the private sector report higher levels of coverage than other private sector workers, although both report lower levels than state employees.

Table 12c covers union presence and activity in different types of work places. It is important to note that unions in Vietnam are set up by the state rather than independently formed workers’ organisations. They play a variety of roles within the work place, but primarily mediate between management and workers. Not unexpectedly, therefore, state-based employees were more likely to report the presence of trade unions at their work place, with those outside the garment sector most likely to report such a presence. Following from this, a higher percentage of state employees were members of trade unions. Among private employees, garment workers were far more likely to report the presence of trade unions than wage workers in other sectors (58 percent compared to 20 percent). Indeed only 34 out of 172 private sector wage workers in the non-garment sector reported a trade union in their work place. Consequently, the discussion of the rest of the results pertaining to trade unions focuses only on garment workers, public sector as well as private, and state employees outside the garment sector. Among these workers, membership of a trade union was much higher in the state sector, both within and outside the garment industry, than among privately employed garment workers (80-86 percent compared to 42 percent).

Taking account only of those workers reporting union membership, state employees generally reported greater activity on the part of trade unions than privately employment garment workers. Trade activity appears to have been highest in relation to meetings and visits and to a lesser extent,

the education of members. It was lower in relation to collective bargaining, consultation of members and membership initiation of issues, particularly among privately employed garment workers.

Summary

We noted earlier that a comparison of the terms and conditions prevailing in the “traded” and “non-traded” sectors in Vietnam might be complicated by the presence of the state in both sectors. This is borne by the analysis in this section. State employees, regardless of where they were located, received more comprehensive package of benefits than did private enterprise in both the sectors. They also enjoyed greater participation in trade union activity. To that extent, employees of the state were better off than private sector employees, regardless of whether they were located in the traded or non-traded sector. It would appear that Vietnam’s socialist principles have helped to insulate state-employed garment workers from the erosion of social protection generally associated with competing in a labour-intensive sector of the global economy.

At the same time, however, state employed garment workers enjoyed somewhat lower levels of benefits than state employees in the non-traded sector. This may partly reflect the fact that the latter were made up of salaried civil servants as well as waged workers in domestic SOEs but the longer hours of overtime and fewer holidays reported by state employees in the garment industry are typical of export-oriented garment production elsewhere. To that extent, we can say that the demands of global competition have helped to moderate the influence of socialist principles in the traded sector.

A final comparison relates to privately employed wage workers in the traded and non-traded sector. Here we find that privately employed workers in the non-traded sector were less likely than those in the traded sector to know about the labour code, to be covered by a labour contract, to have social insurance or trade union representation. Although we have not included self-employed workers in much of this analysis, it was as true of this group as it was of wage workers. To that extent, non-garment workers in the private sector worked in the more casualised segments of the urban economy in our sample. On the other hand, they still earned higher wages on average than did workers in the traded sector and had somewhat shorter working days.

3. *Subjective Assessments of Employment in Traded and Non-traded Sectors: the Workers' Perspectives*

We have relied so far on various pre-determined criteria in order to evaluate the terms and conditions characterising work within and outside the “traded” garment sector. We turn now to some of the subjective evaluations of the workers themselves. We base this part of the analysis on their responses to a number of questions included in our survey instrument. One set of questions related to the advantages and disadvantages they perceived in relation to their work. A second set of question explored what workers saw as the personal benefits and costs associated with their work and benefits. Responses to both these questions were left open-ended. Finally, they were asked if there was any other job they preferred to the one they were currently employed in.

Positive and negative dimensions of garment work.

Table 13 reports on the various advantages and disadvantages that the different sub-categories of workers associated with their current jobs. These have been summarised into a number of broad categories to simplify the exposition, but each category has to be interpreted in relation to the workers in question and their previous experiences of employment. However, it is immediately clear from a comparison of workers in each category reporting no advantages and no disadvantages to their current employment, that workers in the garment sector were considerably more aware than non-garment workers of the negative aspects of their jobs and somewhat less able to perceive its positive aspects: 12-13 percent saw *no advantages* to their jobs compared to only 4-6 percent of non-garment workers while only 3 percent saw no *disadvantages* to their work compared to 18-27 percent of non-garment workers.

The main advantages identified by garment workers were clustered around two categories in Table 13: “ease of entry” into garment work and “its suitability to women”. The significance attached to ease of entry partly reflected who the workers were. As noted earlier, most of them were recent migrants who had been in the city for less than 5 years. Their main reason for migrating was in search of employment because there was not enough work in the rural economy or small towns from which they had migrated. Most did not have proper residency status and many were unregistered. For these women, garment work represented ease of entry for a number of reasons: it did not require high educational levels, any particular skills or experience or access to capital. As one woman put it, “It is easy to find the work, easy to learn it , easy to do it”. In addition, the garment sector represented ease of entry because of its willingness to hire workers with temporary or

unregistered status. As the earlier table showed, a much higher percentage of garment workers, particularly those in the private sector, had temporary and unregistered migrants than the other forms of work represented in our sample.

The responses classified under “suitable for women” were also varied. Sometimes they took the form of an explicit statement explaining why garment work was suitable to women, sometimes of a description of the characteristics which were believed to make it a “feminine” occupation: “It is simple, patient work that is suitable for women”. For some women, it was the use of sewing skills, typically associated with women in the Vietnamese context. For others, it was clear from their responses that they were comparing it with other forms of work of which they had experience. Farm work constituted the major point of reference for many and was described as hard physical labour carried out in the open fields with no shelter from the sun or rain. By contrast, garment work was “inside” work, it was seen as clean and light work and hence appropriate for women.

Many whose responses have been categorised as “better than other forms of work” also made similar comparisons with the kind of alternative forms of employment that they knew. Here the main emphasis was on “better pay” or “more regular pay” and the “other forms of work” usually mentioned were farm work and various forms of off-farm self employment available in rural areas or small towns. “Stability of income” was another response which often contained an implicit or explicit comparison with other forms of work that women knew of or had experienced.

The responses clustered under “suited to my abilities/skills/preferences” referred to specific characteristics of workers which were seen to be appropriate to the job. For instance, many believed that factory work made better use of their educational qualifications than farm work or various forms of off-farm enterprise available in rural areas. Others referred to the fact that they already knew how to use the sewing machine. However, a number of workers described garment work as their preferred option: “my favourite job”. Together with those who gave more personal reasons as the main advantage of garment work, it was clear that the connection with fashion, with the ability to make clothes for themselves and their family in the future were among the reasons that export garment work appealed to a number of these younger women. Other personal reasons included getting to know women from different parts of the country and making new friends. For some, the advantage of garment work had little to do the work itself, but the fact that “it was paid work”, that

it contributed to solving the problem of unemployment or that it provided temporary until they found a preferred form of employment.

The reasons why 12-13 percent of the garment workers were unwilling to state any advantages to garment work become obvious from an examination of the disadvantages associated with garment employment. Only 3 percent of garment workers were not able to state any disadvantage to their jobs. The overwhelming majority of complaints focused on problems directly or indirectly generated by their working hours. This was not surprising, given that they worked longer hours than any other group of workers in our sample. Around 50 percent of these workers explicitly stated long hours of work as the main disadvantages associated with their jobs. The rest complained about having to sit in the same position for extended periods of time, exhaustion, having no time or energy left to enjoy the company for friends, for finding a boyfriend or expanding social relationships, having to work late into the night, various occupational health problems, including headache, backache, poor vision, sore throat, dizziness, rhinitis. Thus, although many of the workers had given their reason for coming into a city, or for taking up factory work, their desire to meet new people and make new friendships, it was evident from their responses that their jobs left many of them with very little time or energy to do so.

Environmental disadvantages referred to the dust, heat and noise that characterised working conditions in many factories. The high percentage who mentioned health as a problem generally did so in conjunction with the long hours of work or environmental factors. In addition, for around 20 percent of workers, low pay was also a major disadvantage of their current jobs.

Turning to workers elsewhere in the economy, private sector employment, both waged work and self-employment, were mainly valued for ease of entry, suitability to women and “suitability to own abilities/preferences”, all advantages also prioritised by garment workers. The characteristics that made an occupation suitable to women did not vary a great deal across sectors: clean, light work that could be carried out indoors. However, in explaining ease of entry, self-employed women put a great deal of emphasis on the low capital requirements of a particular activity. Those who emphasised the suitability of a job to their own abilities/preferences sometimes referred to the fit between their low educational qualifications and the requirements of the job, sometimes to the fact that they were older and hence could not do the same kind of physical labour they might have been able to once,

and sometimes to the fact that they had young children and were constrained in their choice of work.

Strikingly, the “time factor” also featured in the responses of the workers in the non-garment sample, particularly the self-employed but in more positive terms. These women spoke of their shorter working hours, of their ability to manage their time and work according to their needs, and the ability to carry out their domestic responsibilities, including looking after their children as some of the major advantages of their work. Many worked at or near home which also facilitated the ability to combine their multiple responsibilities. Some private sector workers valued the social aspects of their work, that they could stay in touch with friends and family and meet new people. Others valued its relative independence: being dependent on others or working under their authority was associated with higher levels of tension. In addition, references by some of the women to stability of income, to the availability of state protection, to the use or upgrading of their professional skills and to promotional prospects are a reminder that a sizeable minority of these women were in salaried employees.

In terms of disadvantages, some private sector workers mentioned conditions of work which resembled those reported by garment workers: long hours, stressful work, unhealthy working conditions. Whereas garment workers complained about having to sit for long hours in the same posture, many self-employed traders complained about having to walk the streets for many hours in pursuit of their trade. Some found their work uninspiring, adding nothing to their skills, others complained of its monotony. Still other disadvantages included having to be on their feet all day, the physical hardship of the work involved, insecurities associated with trade in perishable goods, the absence of any form of social protection and having to work out in the open, regardless of weather. It is worth noting that irregularity of work was the only disadvantage which was more frequently mentioned by workers outside the garment industry than within it.

The main advantage associated with state sector employment outside the garment sector was stability of employment: this perceived stability is likely to reflect the greater likelihood of labour contracts, to offer permanent position and various forms of social security. The next most frequently mentioned advantage related to various aspects of the work involved which were seen to suit women: it was indoors work, it was clean, not physically demanding and so on. In addition, of

all the different occupations represented in our sample, state employment was seen as most conducive to social relationships, as enhancing skills as well as knowledge of the wider world and as offering a sufficient income. It also elicited more responses than other occupations testifying to the personal job satisfaction: “I work with children, that makes me very happy”; “teaching is a noble profession, it carries respect in society”; “I am able to help the old and the weak”.

Interestingly, “ease of entry” was least likely to feature as an advantage in relation to state sector employment. As we have noted, workers in this sub-sector had the highest levels of education – many valued state sector employment for the opportunity of using their qualifications - and were most likely to be permanent residents of the city. State sector employment offered the greatest security and better working conditions than other forms of work but was commensurately hardest to get into. However, while state employees were least likely to report disadvantages in relation to their jobs, the disadvantages that featured most frequently in their accounts were hours of work, regularity of work/income and low pay, suggesting that not all state employees enjoyed the same conditions of work.

The greater heterogeneity of jobs which characterised the non-garment workers in our sample, relative to garment workers, is evident from the greater range of responses they gave in relation to both advantages and disadvantages. It is also evident in the varying conditions of work reported by the same sub-category of workers. For some self-employed workers, self-employment was valued for the flexibility it offered while for others, irregularity of work was experienced as a source of insecurity. Some privately employed wage workers valued their work because it gave them a “high” or “sufficient” income while others complained that they did not earn enough.

The next table reports on what workers felt they themselves had gained from their jobs as well as personal costs associated with their work. This partly repeats the information provided by their account of advantages and disadvantages, but also adds some new insights. Once again, while most workers could see some benefits to their employment, garment workers were more likely than the rest to also perceive costs. For the garment workers as a group, the main benefits of their employment related directly to what their incomes allowed them to do: to earn an income, to exercise purchasing power, the ability to save, to look after themselves, to contribute to their families. These benefits featured far more frequently in the accounts of garment workers than they

did among non-garment workers. In some cases, the benefit lay simply in the fact that their work provided them with an income (“it is paid work”), in so more frequently, however, it was stated in positive terms as a source of financial independence. This was expressed in a number of different ways. For some, it was having an income of their own. For others, it was not having to depend on their husbands or be a burden on their parents. And for yet others, it was expressed as a sense of personal achievement: “I want to be a self-made woman”, “I have a regular income so I can stand on my own feet”.

Private sector garment workers were more likely to value the stability of their employment while state employees mentioned the acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Other personal benefits included learning new skills (acquiring work experience or having money to pay for classes), saving for the future; greater feelings of security, stability and self-confidence; getting out of farm work and getting a “professional job”; being able to live in the city, expanding social relations (“making new friends from other provinces”) and various provisions associated with their particular workplace (trade union protection, pension, health and social security). A number of women saw work in garments as a stepping stone to future self-employment in some form of tailoring-related activity.

The main costs associated with garment work once again revolved around the time factor: complaints about long working hours and its adverse effects on their health and social life, feelings of tension and pressure because of production norms, lack of time to visit friends and family, to give to their children, to rest, to make friends, the inconvenience/insecurity of working late into the night and so on. Other personal disadvantages, though far less frequently mentioned, included having to live far from their families, missing their families, not earning enough to save, the high cost of living in the city, fear of not getting married, particularly since co-workers were largely female, “narrow social relations” and boredom at work.

The non-garment workers mentioned a greater *range* of benefits than the garment workers – they were the more heterogeneous group - but certain benefits cropped with much greater frequency than others for all three sub-categories: stability of employment, the ability to look after oneself, to contribute to the family, to have purchasing power, to utilise existing skills and qualifications, to acquire new skills and knowledge. However, those in state employment were more likely than the rest to mention stability of employment, personal satisfaction and acquisition of new skills. Those in

private employment were more likely to value the capacity to look after themselves and their families and flexibility in the use of their time.

Non-garment workers were less likely to perceive costs of employment than garment workers, but of those that did, state employees were more likely to mention hours of work while private sector employees mentioned social relationships, both at work (having to please customers, rude bosses) and in their personal lives (not having time for leisure, for their children and so on).

Expressed preference for alternative employment

While it is clear from their responses that most workers in our sample had both positive and negative things to say about the work they did, we do not know the intensity with which they experienced these advantages and disadvantages, costs and benefits. Thus, “health” featured as a disadvantage for workers both within and outside the garment sector, but getting a sore throat from talking to children all day, a health-related disadvantage mentioned by a teacher, is likely to have been of a different order to the health effects associated with having to sit in the same posture for hours at a time in a dusty environment, the disadvantage mentioned by many garment workers. However, it was telling that a much higher percentage of garment workers could point to the negative aspects of their work than could workers in other sub-categories. Responses to one further question intended to elicit their levels of job satisfaction, reported in Table 15, helped to both confirm and clarify this pattern. Workers were asked whether or not there was some other form of activity that they would rather be doing in preference to their current occupation, 38 percent of both state and private sector garment workers stated that there was. There was greater variation among the non-garment workers. Privately employed wage workers expressed almost as highest levels of job dissatisfaction as garment workers: 35 percent would rather have been doing some other job. Of self-employed workers, 26 percent would have rather been doing something else. Not unexpectedly, given the preceding analysis, state employees outside the garment sector expressed the highest levels of satisfaction with their current jobs: only 19 percent would have been rather doing something else.

Table 15 also reports on the kind of jobs that those who expressed dissatisfaction with their current jobs would rather have been doing. Among garment workers, the preferred option was some form of small business, including home-based tailoring, various forms of retailing and jobs which required some kind of educational or professional qualification: teachers, doctors, accountants, office work

and civil service. A small percentage wanted better jobs within the garment industry. Among non-garment workers, there was also a preference for self-employment, particular among private wage workers (although it was not as widespread as among garment workers) professional and office work.

Workers who expressed a preference for some alternative form of employment were asked why they had not taken up such employment. The failure to find alternative work featured more frequently among garment workers than non-garment workers as a reason, but the most frequently given reason among both groups was either lack of the necessary capital or of the necessary qualifications.

Our analysis in earlier sections of the paper have suggested a variety of reasons why workers might wish to change their jobs. Some are likely to be personal to them – their past experiences, their current circumstances, what earning an income means to them – while some are likely to reflect features of their work: hours of work, the perceived adequacy of returns, whether or not it is state employment. In this final stage of our analysis, we use multivariate analysis to explore some of the factors which help to explain variations in expressions of job satisfaction among workers in our study and the extent to which these varied between garment and non-garment workers.

The dependent variable in the analysis, workers' job preferences, is a dichotomous one which took the value of 1 if the worker in question did express a preference for alternative employment and 0 otherwise. We therefore used logistical regression analysis to investigate which of a range of possible explanatory variables, selected on the basis of the preceding discussion, helped to account for differences in expressed preferences by our two broad categories of workers. A negative sign to the estimated co-efficient suggests that the variable in question is associated with a greater likelihood of job satisfaction with current employment, while a positive sign suggests higher likelihood of job dissatisfaction.

Table 16 provides explanations for all the variables used in the analysis together with means and standard deviations for the two samples. The results of the analysis are presented in Tables 17.1 and 17.2 for the garment and non-garment workers respectively. Model 1 in the two tables reports on the results of regression analysis using variables which captured workers' individual and household characteristics while Model 2 adds in various aspects of their working conditions.

Model 1 variables include the education level of the worker, whether or not her household uses inferior forms of fuel, whether or not her household had experienced food shortages in the past year and whether or not she was able to save. The ability to save is a somewhat mixed variable since it is partly a function of the dependency ratio of the household and partly of incomes earned. To that extent, it captures aspects of both workers' family and work.

The findings suggest first of all, that among garment workers, but not among other workers, higher levels of education were associated with a greater likelihood of preferring alternative employment. It was evident that many of the women who migrated from the countryside in search of work saw garment employment as a first step towards other, more desirable forms of work. These are the women for whom the main advantage of garment work was simply that it provided them with a temporary source of income till they had found something better. The more educated among these women were not only likely to have higher aspirations for themselves than women with less education but also a greater likelihood of realising their aspirations.

The findings also suggest that variations in household socio-economic status played less of a role in explaining variations in the likelihood of job dissatisfaction among garment workers than non-garment workers, perhaps because there was less variation in the socio-economic status of garment workers. Among garment workers, socio-economic differentials relevant to their job preferences were largely captured by variations in household food security while among non-garment workers, employment preferences varied with levels of food insecurity as well as with use of inferior fuels, both indicators of poverty. For both groups, the poorer the household, the less satisfied the worker with their current employment.

Women with children were less likely to express preference for alternative forms of employment among non-garment workers but not among garment workers. As we have noted, most garment workers did not have any children so child care considerations were not relevant to most of them. Among non-garment workers, this finding may reflect the fact that most women with children have opted for forms of employment that are compatible with child care and hence are unlikely to be interested in alternative employment in the near future.

Finally, ability to save influenced garment workers' employment preferences, but not workers elsewhere in the economy. Once again, the discussion earlier in the paper offers a possible explanation for this. It suggests that for the large majority of garment workers, who have migrated recently into the city in search of work and who valued the ability to remit money home to their families, the capacity to save will be an important factor in determining whether or not they are satisfied with the work they currently do. Among non-garment workers, on the other hand, most of whom live with their families, the capacity to save may be an important but not a determining factor in shaping their employment preferences.

Model 2 adds a number of variables that reflect different aspects of the working conditions characterizing the two sets of workers: mean monthly income, existence of a written labor contract, presence of a trade union, membership of a trade union, length of the working day, regularity of pay and whether or not the worker had been without work in the previous year. Variables that proved significant in Model 1 retain their significance, except for capacity to save among garment workers, the influence of which may now be captured by workers' income. The results for Model 2 suggest that workers' preferences for current employment tended to vary directly with the "formal" characteristics of their current employment and negatively with its informal characteristics. They also suggest that these factors were of greater significance in explaining garment workers' preferences than workers elsewhere in the economy.

As far as garment workers were concerned, the magnitude of monthly earnings, regularity of pay, membership of a trade union, the length of the working day all served to influence their preference regarding their present vis-à-vis alternative forms of employment. The higher and more regular the income earned by garment workers, the less likely they were to express preference for alternative forms of employment. Membership, rather than simple presence, of trade unions also contributed to apparently greater satisfaction with their current employment. In other words, dissatisfaction with current employment was most likely to be found among garment workers at the "informal" end of the industry characterized by poor and irregular pay, long hours of work and lower levels of union membership. One puzzling result relates to the fact that written contracts, an important indicator of the formality of working conditions, and more likely to be found in SOEs than private firms, was significantly associated with preference for alternative employment.

As far as workers outside the garment sector were concerned, three work-related variables proved significant in predicting their preference for alternative employment: level of income, the existence of a written contract and periods of unemployment in the previous year. These are characteristics most likely to be found in private sector waged workers: these workers had the lowest pay of all the non-garment workers, were less likely than state employees to have written contracts and as likely as the self-employed to have been out of work in the previous year.

Summary

How workers viewed their jobs appeared to reflect a number of different factors, including their previous occupational history, their current employment options and where they were in their life course. It is clear from the analysis in this paper that the garment workers in our sample were a much more homogenous group with regard to these factors than those outside the garment sector. They came from similar age groups, had migrated recently from the countryside, were at similar stages of their life course, had similar levels of education and worked in similar kinds of work, although there were some differences in their working conditions, depending on whether they worked for state-owned enterprises or privately owned ones.

The non-garment workers in our sample were far more heterogeneous. They were generally older than the garment workers and had lived longer in the city but there was much greater variation in their ages, marital status, education levels and the kinds of work they did. As workers, they straddled both state and private sectors where they were employed in salaried civil service and office jobs, professional and basic services, skilled and unskilled manual labour and various forms of petty, small and medium sized businesses. They were salaried employees, long and short term wage workers, self-employed in own-account or family business as well as employers of others.

One result of this difference between the two categories of workers is that the advantages and disadvantages, costs and benefits reported by garment workers tended to be far more clustered around a more limited set of responses while those of workers outside the garment sector were far more dispersed. Garment workers evaluated their jobs from the perspective of rural migrants, whose only employment options in the countryside had been farm work or off-farm self-employment. Employment in garment factories had the advantage, first and foremost, of offering ease of entry to women who had few formal skills and insecure residential status. It also offered a more stable form

of employment, and higher and more regular income, than most forms of employment in the countryside. It allowed them to look after themselves and to be less of a burden to their parents. This sense of self-reliance was the most frequently mentioned of the personal benefits of work for garment workers.

However, it was also clear that garment work was not an unalloyed benefit and that the terms and conditions of work in the garment factories, particularly long hours sitting in the same posture, doing the same repetitive tasks, for lower levels of pay than other wage workers in the urban economy, affected all garment workers, regardless of who they worked for, and constituted a major source of dissatisfaction. Not surprisingly, a high percentage of them would have preferred some alternative form of work. Workers least likely to be satisfied with their current jobs were those from poorer households, who presumably had the worst forms of employment, more educated women, who aspired to more rewarding jobs, those who earned less on average within the industry, worked longer hours on average, were unable to save, were not active in trade unions and had experienced irregularity in their income flows. Interestingly, employment in an SOE had no bearing on workers' satisfaction with their current jobs.

The heterogeneity of workers and of jobs outside the garment industry meant that the advantages and disadvantages, costs and benefits reported by workers in relation to their jobs varied considerably, not only across sub-categories, but also within them. Satisfaction with their present employment tended to vary with personal circumstances to a greater extent than it did with garment workers. Women with children, who had presumably taken up forms of work which suited their domestic constraints, were less likely to express preference for alternative employment than those without. Poorer women, those from households which had experienced food insecurity and relied in inferior forms of fuel, were also likely to express dissatisfaction with their current jobs: these are women who are least able to exercise choice in relation to the jobs they did.

The highest levels of satisfaction were expressed by state employees. These were the most educated women in our sample and they enjoyed greater security of employment and social benefits than the rest of the sample. They valued the stability of their employment, the social benefits it offered and the sociability in permitted. They were least likely to state any disadvantages or personal costs but those that did mentioned a variety of different factors, including working hours, pay and so on.

Women in self-employment found ease of entry an important advantage to their jobs. They were most likely to value their jobs for the flexibility it offered in terms of managing their time between work and family. Self-employed women were most likely to have children so this was clearly an important consideration. They earned higher income on average than any other sub-category. At the same time, there were also many self-employed women at the poorer end of the scale, often own-account vendors who worked long hours on the streets for whom self-employment represented insecurity rather than flexibility.

Women in waged work were the least educated in our overall sample of workers and the most recent migrants outside the garment sector. Their levels of dissatisfaction with their current employment was as high as those of workers in the garment industry. They enjoyed lower levels of social protection than wage workers in the garment sector but they did not appear to have to suffer long working hours that led to such high levels of dissatisfaction among garment workers.

Globalisation, Gender and Poverty in Vietnam: Micro-Macro Perspectives

The implications of Vietnam's growing integration into the global economy have to be understood in the context of its transition from a centrally planned command economy to one where market forces are being given a greater role. While de-collectivization of agriculture has been associated with a rise in the rate of agricultural growth, the collapse of the agricultural co-operatives has led to high levels of unemployment and underemployment in the rural areas. The reduction of the state sector and the equitisation and closure of a large number of SOEs, have led to the retrenchment of thousands of workers, many of them women. While the industrial sector has grown in the period of transition, it has failed to generate an increase in employment commensurate with this growth, primarily because it continues to be dominated by SOEs which tend to be more capital intensive than private sector enterprise. It is the private service sector that is generating most jobs at present but employment is also growing in the export-oriented manufacturing end of industry, with garment manufacturing playing a leading role.

For the majority of the population, but particularly the poorer, rural population, access to off-farm employment is a key route to future prosperity. A variety of push factors, including high levels of rural unemployment/underemployment and the drudgery of farm work, have led to increasing

numbers of migrants seeking work in urban areas. Rural-urban income disparities, and the possibility of earning far higher levels of income in the city than they ever could in the countryside, together with relaxation of controls on migration are added pull factors.

The women who have migrated to urban areas are largely young, single and without children. While this may be an artefact of employers' preferences, particularly in the export manufacturing sector, they are also precisely the cohort who are able to migrate because they do not have the child care and domestic responsibilities that older married women are normally required to take on. However, the kinds of jobs they find will be partly determined by their educational levels. It appears that those with at least secondary education are taking jobs in export manufacturing while those with lower levels of education are mainly found in various forms of waged and self employment, mainly in the urban informal economy.

Entry into garment work thus represents for many women an aspect of the diversification strategies of rural households. In others, however, it represents their attempt to become less of a burden on families that have become increasingly responsible for their upkeep, given the withdrawal of the state. These were the young women who described themselves as single person households and whose main reason for taking up garment work was the need for self-reliance or the search for independence.

However, a comparison of wages and working conditions reported by different sub-categories of workers in our sample explains why such a high percentage of garment workers, higher than the non-garment workers as a group, and as high as waged workers outside the garment industry, expressed a preference for alternative forms of work. Given the hours of work, and the conditions under which they work, it is not humanly possible for any worker to work for more than a limited number of years in the industry. However, while public sector employment outside the garment sector, may offer the greatest security and social protection, although not necessarily the highest earnings, it is not open to all.

A more desirable alternative is self-employment. Unlike a number of other low-income countries, returns to self-employment in Vietnam can be higher than returns to formal state employment. It also had the added advantage that it was compatible with the care of young children, and was

therefore attractive to women once they began having children. However, there were considerable variations within this group in our study since it included many own-account workers, working long hours in the streets for a pittance, at one end of the spectrum and owners of small businesses who employed other people at the other end. For young, unmarried women coming in from the countryside, where there were few opportunities, employment in the garment industry constituted a stepping stone to positioning themselves at the more favourable end of the self-employment spectrum. It allowed them to accumulate sufficient funds to invest in small businesses once they started their own families.

Stepping back from the immediate findings of our research, there are also questions to be raised about the future prospects of the industry in Vietnam as well as of those sections of the labour force which it has so far recruited. Vietnam has consistently featured in the development literature as an example of a country that has successfully translated its per capita GNP into levels of human development outcomes that are much higher than might be expected on the basis of the performance of other countries at its level of per capita income. It is not clear to what extent it will be able to maintain this achievement into the future. Globalisation has coincided in the case of Vietnam with the deregulation of the labour market, the privatisation of production and the (as yet) partial withdrawal of a state that has supported a very effective regime of human and social reproduction.

This regime has meant that the country is better positioned to survive beyond the final phase out of the MFA at the end of 2004 because it has higher labour standards in its factories than many of its low income (and higher income) competitors, in a global economy where such considerations have become an increasing aspect of competitive advantage. However, its competitive edge on this front may be eroded with its increasing integration into the global economy.

One challenge relates to its human capital resources. Efforts have to be made to make sure that there is on-going investment in the country's human capital. Efforts also have to be made to ensure that such investment takes a dynamic approach, particularly in relation to women workers, who tend to be retrenched when industries upgrade their technologies. It is obvious that other industries are going to emerge with expanding globalisation that will need different kinds of skills and there will be opportunities, and pressures, for upgrading technologies within existing industries. Greater

vocational training geared to these new opportunities will equip women workers to participate effectively in these changing opportunities rather than becoming redundant as they are taken up.

The second challenge relates to the issue of labour standards. Despite the adoption of a comprehensive Labour Code, and its implementation in many of the factories covered by this study, workers in the export sector, even in the state-owned enterprises, are required to put in working hours that are not humanly sustainable in the long run. They may, and probably will, of course, leave to seek other employment, but as increasing sectors of the economy are exposed to global competition, it is unlikely that they will find forms of work that will allow them to protect and promote their own human capital, including of course their health. The private sector in Vietnam is far more likely to fall short of Labour Code requirements but it is not at all clear to what extent it is being observed in state enterprises.

Thus, in Vietnam, as elsewhere, the foreign exchange gains of globalisation, and the labour market flexibility which it requires, have been purchased at a high cost to the workers who have made these gains possible. At the same time, Vietnam, as other low-income countries, faces the dilemma that attempting to enforce its labour code, particularly within private enterprise, may end up making its labour force less competitive in the international economy. It may be important to revisit its own Labour Code which is extremely comprehensive – perhaps over-comprehensive. Its own National Committee for the Advancement of Women has pointed out the exclusionary implications of some of its protective clauses for women workers. However, the Labour Code was drawn in the early stages of the transition to a market economy by a state that may not have fully appreciated the implications of transferring responsibility for maintaining labour standards and social protection for workers to the private sector.

Whatever the future of the Labour Code, some degree of state action, in partnership with the private sector, will be necessary if some basic minimum level of social protection is to be provided to workers across the export sector. However, these efforts cannot be undertaken in isolation. Social protection will also be necessary for those outside the garment sector, largely located in the countryside, who will otherwise provide cheap and easily exploitable labour for global capital because they have no employment options and no social security. Any efforts to promote labour

standards in the export sector would be undermined by the neglect of workers in the unprotected economy.

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Table 1 Changing distribution of employment

	1992-93	1997-98	% change
Agriculture	71.2	66.4	-4.7
Industry	11.8	13.1	+1.3
Industry minus construction	10.3	10.7	+0.4
Services	17.0	20.5	+3.4

Patrick Belser (2000: Table 3 (Based on VLSS 1 and 2)).

Table 2 Distribution of garment and non-garment workers between state and private sector

	Garment workers	Non-garment workers: waged	Non-garment workers: self-employed
State	239 (39%)	167 (28%)	
Private	265 (44%)	150 (25%)	196(33%)
Co-operative	21 (3%)	-	-
Other	79 (13%)	22 (4%)	63 (11%)
Total	604 (100%)	339 (57%)	259 (43%)

Table 3: Occupations of non-garment workers

	Frequency	Percent
Factory worker in state/private enterprise	55	9
Employed in micro-enterprise	70	9
home-based tailoring	25	4.2
self-employed tailoring etc.	6	1
Skilled self-employed worker	6	1.0
Self-employed in home-based production	3	1
Privately employed service provider	33	5.5
Self-employed service provider	27	4.5
Employed in small-scale enterprise	48	8.0
Self-employed in micro-enterprise and own-account trading	146	24.4
Salaried government employee	106	17.7
Salaried private employee	42	7
Other, including currently unemployed	31	.2
Total	598	100.0

Table 4. Garment and non-garment workers by size of enterprise unit

Number of workers	State garment workers	Private garment worker	State employees	Private wage worker	Self employed
1-5	-	-	5%	40%	62%
6-10	0	2	2%	9%	5%
10-50	-	1	31%	22%	5%
51-100	1	10	16%	3%	-
100-300	13	35	10%	5%	-
300-500	10	20	11%	3%	1%
501-1000	17	24	5%	5%	0
1001-2500	39	3	5%	1%	-
2500-7000	13	1	6%	1%	0
Don't know	7	3	11%	10%	26%

Table 5a: Demographic characteristics of workers

	State garment workers (239)	Private garment workers (365)	State employees (n=167)	Private wage workers (172)	Private self-employed (259)
Current age (mean years)	27	24	35	32	34
Mean age at starting work	19	18	20	18	18
Single (%)	72	84	34%	53%	30%
Married (%)	27	14	64%	38%	65%
Divorced/widowed (%)	1%	2%	2%	9%	5%
With children (%)	17%	10%	62%	40%	67%
Migrant	78%	90%	44%	54%	58%
Permanent resident	27%	11%	80%	52%	56%
Temporary status	61%	65%	17%	40%	38%
No residency status	12%	24%	3%	8%	6%

Table 5b: Patterns of migration (migrant workers only)

	State garment workers (175)	Private garment workers (323)	State employees (n=70)	Private sector wage workers (91)	Private self-employed (150)
Mean years in the city	6.0	4.2	14.9	9.9	10.9
Migrated in search of work	86%	83%	53	67	67
Migration for educational purposes	2	11	22	10	4
Other reasons for migration	11	6	19	16	23
Migrated with parents	21	9	21	13	14
With husbands	2	2	11	9	15
With siblings	25	20	11	12	15
With friends/acquaintance	29	47	4	12	13
With other relatives	17	18	3	13	12
Migrated alone	38%	33%	42%	27%	35%

Table 5c Current living arrangements

	State garment workers (239)	Private garment workers (365)	State employees (n=167)	Private wage workers (172)	Private self-employed (259)
Unified households	36%	18%	85%	63%	66%
“Divided” households	64%	82%	15%	36%	34%
With parents	9	5	17	19	14
With husband	20%	11%	59	34	47
With siblings	6	7	2	6	6
Friends/acquaintances	26	27	7	11	5
Live with co-workers/others	33	43	10	21	17
Live alone	1%	4%	2	4	4

Table 6 Starting occupation of garment and non-garment workers

	State garment workers (239)	Private garment workers (365)	State employees (n=167)	Private sector wage workers (172)	Private self-employed (259)
Salaried employee (state)	0	0	46	5	9
Salaried employee (private)	0	0	4	5	2
Wage worker in small enterprise	9	9	8	35	19
Own farming	16	16	4	15	16
Factory worker			17	13	8
Private service provider		1	2	5	5
Self-employed trader/vendor	9	7	2	11	22
Garment factory worker	54	51	10	4	5
Self-employed tailoring	13	12	4	4	10

Table 7a Reasons for taking up current work: non-garment workers

	State employees (n=167)	Private sector wage workers (172)	Private self-employed (259)
No work in country, town	5	7	12
Liked the work/suited to my skills	57 (suited)	31	34
Income related	6	8	15
Easy to get into	0	4	3
To earn a living/contribute to family	22	41	27
Social relations			
Benefits			
Suited to women			

Table 7b Reasons for taking up current work: garment workers

	State garment workers (239)	Private garment workers (365)
No work in country, town	21+4	27+5
Suited to my skills etc	17	14
Liked the work	23	21
Income related	27	26
Easy to get into	15	18
Preferred to other alternatives	4	5
Self reliance/contributing to family	15	20
Social relations	11	14
Benefits	10	7
Suited to women	1	1
Acquire skills	3	2

Table 8. Socio-economic characteristics of workers and their households

	SOE garment workers	Private garment workers	State employees	Private wage workers	Self-employed
Workers' education: 0-5 years	1%	3%	2%	19%	16%
Workers' education: 6-10 years	52%	60%	20%	41%	46%
Workers education: 10+ years	48%	37%	78%	41%	39%
Heads* education: 0-5 years	24	30	11	27	20
Heads* education: 6-10 years	51	59	27	48	44
Heads* education: 10+ years education	26	12	62	26	36
Head* in farming	36%	53%	7%	21%	25%
Head* in state employment	6%	5%	31%	9%	12%
Rented housing	63%	79%	28	52	46
Mean size of dwelling unit (sq.m)	31	24	57	45	52
Numbers sharing dwelling unit	4.5	5.2	4.7	5.1	5.2
Cooking fuel: kerosene/coal	68%	73%	23%	51%	45%
Cooking fuel: gas	30	17	68	40	43
Cooking fuel: 'other'	3	9	10	9	12
TV (own/shared)	33	10	53%	37%	38%
Motor bike (own/shared)	24	13	62%	36	36
Telephone (own/shared)	8	3	42%	17%	19%
Bike (own/shared)	13	12	43%	56	49
Radio (own/shared)	21	13	50	26	31
Food shortage in past yr	13%	13%	4	13	7
Able to save	45%	52%	50%	44%	54%
Mean savings (in 000)	1991	1823	6503	3129	5179

	SOE garment workers	Private garment workers	State employees	Private wage workers	Self-employed
dong)					
Sent remittance	36	51	19	31	36
More than 25% of income	13%	23%	5	15	18
Received remittance	16	13	14	15	11
More than 25% of income	3	2	5	2	4

*Excluding households where garment worker is head

Table 9: Socio-economic indicator on “divided” households

	SOE garment workers (n=141)	Private garment workers (n=264)	Other private wage workers (n=58)	Self-employed (n=80)
% temporary migrants	77%	73%	76%	78%
% unregistered migrants	18%	26%	10%	15%
No. of years in the city	4.5	3.6	5.5	6.6
Living alone	2	4	11	10
Workers’ education: 0-5	1%	3%	7%	23%
Workers education: 6-10 years	52%	58%	56%	60%
Workers education: 10+	47%	39%	37%	17%
Head’s education 0-5	19%	24%	22%	28%
Heads’ education: 6-10	56%	65%	59%	55%
Head’s education: 10+	25%	10%	19%	18%
Asset ownership in household left behind: colour TV	74%	69%	64%	58%
Telephone	9%	5%	14%	9%
Motor bike	39%	34%	32%	28%
Radio	73%	68%	49%	53%
Food shortage	3%	5%	5%	9%

Table 10: The Labour Code: knowledge and priorities

	State garment	Private garment	State other	Private other	Self-employed
Know about labour code	177 (74%)	159 (44%)	131 (78%)	48 (28%)	38 (15%)
Of whom: knowledge of minimum wage	53%	54%	62%	58%	16%
Most important items: timely payment	79%	91%	79%	83%	66%
Rest time during work	27%	33%	7%	23%	11%
Annual leave	29%	24%	40%	33%	24%
Overtime pay	40%	52%	29%	42%	29%
Severance pay	35%	34%	31%	31%	8%
Social Insurance	44%	45%	57%	50%	55%
Maternity leave	32%	16%	47%	23%	26%
Creche	6%	1%	3%	2%	5%
Conflict resolution	3%	2%	3%	2%	5%
Complaint procedure	3%	3%	3%	4%	8%

Table 11: Existence and terms of labour contracts; by sector and ownership category (waged workers only)

	State garment employment	Private garment employment	Other state employment (N=167)	Other private sector employment (n=172)
Number reporting labour contract (%)	233 (98%)	309 (85%)	160 (96%)	91 (53%)
Of which:				
% with written contracts	99%	77%	98	48
% covering period of contract	83%	68%	81	58
% contracts covering pay rate	85%	76%	95	95
% contracts covering overtime	71%	54%	59	35
% contracts covering benefits	72%	42%	80	34
% contracts covering holidays	91	73	98	64
% contracts covering maternity leave	76	54	88	36
% contracts covering lunch	58%	54%	49	53
% contracts covering social insurance	90	56	88	34
% contracts covering health insurance	84	60	89	39

Table 12a: Pay, working hours and periods without work

	State garment	Private garment	State 'other'	Private 'other'	Self employed
Mean value of maximum monthly payment	867	796	1220	936	1312
Mean value of minimum monthly payment	403	408	759	590	712
Mean value of average monthly payment	611	572	888	704	921
Regularity of pay					
Average working day (hours)	11	11	8.6	9.4	10.1
No. of holidays a month	1.8	2.2	6.2	2.3	0.8
Without work in 2001	42%	56%	7%	22%	24%
Mean number of times (of those reporting)	2	2	11	9	10

Table 12b. Social benefits at work

	State garment	Private garment	State other	Private other
Lunch/food	49%	59%	53%	36%
Maternity leave provision	25%	10%	55%	10%
Bonus at New Year	61%	47%	97%	69%
Bonus	91%	79%	80%	42%
Workers pay social security	91%	49%	85%	19%
Company pays social security	78%	38%	81%	15%

Table 12c: Union presence and activities

	State garment	Private garment	State other	Private other
Numbers reporting trade union in work place (%)	191 96%	152 58%	156 (93%)	34 (20%)
% of total reporting membership	80 %	42%	86%	14%
Main activities of union by those reporting presence:				
Hold meetings	86	72	97	92
Visit members	94	72	93	88
Collective bargaining	55	26	55	58
Educate members	64	45	71	58
Consulted by trade union	22	24	46	8
Raised issues with trade union	28	19	44	25
Benefit from trade union	82	62	88	92

Table 13a Advantages associated with current employment

	State garment	Private garment	State other	Private other	Self-employed
Zero advantages	12	13	5	6	4
High income	2	4	7	6	2
Easy entry	44	43	11	25	22
Suited to women	35	46	14	22	19
Stability	13	12	23	19	16
Paid work	8	8	4	2	4
Skills/knowledge	8	8	13	8	6
Personal reasons	4	8	10	8	7
Social relationships	2	1	15	8	8
Better than other available work	8	9	8	8	12
Suited to my skills, preferences etc	8	8	18	19	16
Time factors			10	5	14
Location			5	6	8
Compatible with domestic responsibilities			5	8	11
Self-management			6	10	15
Enough income			8	3	4
Own money/help family			2	3	5
Miscell.	3	2	14	11	12
Not stated		3			

Table 13b Disadvantages associated with current occupation

	State garment	Private garment	State other	Private other	Self employed
Zero disadvantages	3	3	27	24	18
Time related factors	51	56	13	20	15
Health	33	35	10	7	9
Environment	12	18	8	5	7
Long periods spent sitting/walking	27	25	8	6	9
Low pay	23	23	12	11	10
Boring/monotonous	6	2		3	2
Irregular work	5	3	10	15	17
Social relations	8	5	3	6	8
Concentration/discipline			4	3	3
Not suited to women			6	6	10
No future			5		7
Distance			5	2	5
Neglect of family			5	1	2
Misc.			5	6	7

Table 14a Personal benefits from present employment

	State garment	Private garment	State other	Private other	Self-employed
No benefits	3	5	3	4	7
Stability	15	18	20	10	14
High income			2		-
Personal satisfaction	8	4	10	9	7
Look after self/look after family	37	40	23	36	31
Suit own abilities/needs/qualifications	9	5	14	11	15
Have paid work/purchasing power	23	26	18	18	19
Acquire new skills and knowledge	15	7	17	12	8
Save/security	6	6	1	3	2
Time factors	3	3	2	10	8
Social relations	4	3	8	4	3
Suited to women	7	8	5	6	8
Easy to do					1
Autonomy			1	1	4
Proximity		-	1		
Environment	4	1	2	4	5

Table 14b Personal costs of present employment

	State garment	Private garment	State other	Private other	Self-employed
No costs	15	17	34	33	25
Limited future	2	3	2	4	3
Instability		1	4	2	3
Distance		8	4		5
Health	22	18	5	9	9
Irregular/late hours		1	2	7	6
Long hours	27	23	15	11	11
Low wages	16	17	10	4	8
Social relations	23	18	2	8	10
Environment	3	5	4	4	6
Irregular income	1	3	2		4
Sitting/walking long hours	3	5	4	7	9
Discipline/stress		4	4		3
No savings/cant contribute	1	3	2	1	2
No time for family			4	5	6
Outside work			2	1	3
Hard work			4	3	3
Environmental	1	1	5	6	4
Not stated	3	1		2	

Table 15 Preferences for alternative employment

	State garment	Private garment	State other	Private other	Self-employed
Prefer to do another job	92 (39%)	139 (38%)	32 (19%)	58 (34%)	68 (26%)
Why not do preferred job: Cant find	20%	14%	19	9	4
No capital	33	30	25	33	34
No qualifications	36	45	41	41	37
Other	12	11	13	16	21
Own business	37%	28%	16	21	15
Mechanical parts	2	0	0	0	0
Fashion designer	5	2	0	0	3
Hairdresser/beautician	5	14	3	10	6
Lacquer worker	0	1			
Tailor/ embroidery	4	13	3	5	2
Wage work elsewhere	2	4	0	2	0
Sales	15	10	0	7	3
Translator	1	0			
Student	3	1			
Chef	0	1			
Civil servant	2	1	3	2	7
Office worker	5	1	9	10	10
Professional	10	12	12	10	9
Policeman					
Garment worker	2	5	3	3	2
Manager					
Driver			0	0	2
Nursemaid			0	3	0
Others	4	7	3	3	3

Table 17a Determinants of job satisfaction among garment workers

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	Exp(B)	Sig.	B	Exp(B)	Sig.
Worker's education	.310	1.364	.045	.399	1.490	.015
Has a child	-.376	.687	.146	-.152	.859	.583
Inferior fuel	.083	1.086	.660	.032	1.032	.872
Is able to save	-.320	.726	.060	-.085	.918	.655
Experienced food shortage	.663	1.941	.009	.535	1.708	.042
Written contract				.463	1.589	.056
Presence of trade union				.233	1.263	.406
Membership of trade union				-.420	.657	.083
Length of working day				.128	1.137	.064
Average monthly pay				-.001	.999	.036
Regular pay				-.991	.371	.015
Without work in past year				.060	1.062	.250
Constant	-.874	.417	.042	-1.438	.237	.167
Model 1:	Model 2:					
Correctly predicted (%)				Correctly predicted (%)		
Prefer alternative employment: 37				Prefer alternative employment: 43.8		
Overall : 57				Overall : 62.1		

Table 17b Determinants of job satisfaction among nongarment workers

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	Exp(B)	Sig.	B	Exp(B)	Sig.
Worker's education	-.005	.995	.974	.180	1.197	.260
Has a child	-1.024	.359	.000	-1.005	.366	.000
Fuel	.532	1.702	.018	.550	1.733	.017
Is able to save	-.209	.811	.294	-.119	.888	.565
Experienced food shortage	.794	2.212	.021	.831	2.296	.020
Written contract				-.698	.498	.100
Presence of trade union				.136	1.145	.806
Membership of trade union				.179	1.197	.737
Length of working day				.022	1.023	.610
Average monthly pay				.000	1.000	.034
Regular pay				.342	1.407	.289
Without work in past year				.433	1.541	.084
Constant				-1.030	.357	.055
Model 1:			Model 2:			
Correctly predicted (%)			Correctly predicted (%)			
Prefer alternative employment: 4.4			Prefer alternative employment: 11.4			
Overall	: 74.1		Overall	: 73.2		