

Summary of Key Findings

The findings in this report are based on a quantitative survey conducted among 500 larger, formal women-owned businesses across the country. The women entrepreneurs identified a number of key issues and made recommendations to support the growth of women-owned enterprises. These are summarized below.

Women business owners in Vietnam express a strong need for entrepreneurial education and training.

- When asked about important business concerns, policy recommendations for national government leaders, and what would be helpful for their own business development, the answer of women business owners in Vietnam is clear - more entrepreneurial education, training and technical assistance.
- Women business owners surveyed not only desire general business management skill development, but also specific training and technical assistance in the areas of financial management and accessing new markets.
- Women business owners in Vietnam express a strong interest in training and education targeted specifically for women. This was the number one policy recommendation from the women surveyed, from a list of potential policies and programs. Research in other countries¹ has shown that women learn differently from men, and value the increased level of sharing and relationship-building that happens during women-centric educational programs. Therefore, training designed specifically by and for women is not a reaction to perceived or actual discrimination, nor to a skills gap, but rather recognition of learning style differences and customer preferences.
- At several points in the survey, women with 25 or more employees express greater than average concern with issues of business management and growth and their own skill development than do all women surveyed. Therefore, it might be useful to consider special, focused entrepreneurial training for the owners of established firms with employees in addition to programs focused at the small and start-up level.

The current lack of attention to the needs of women business owners in Vietnam is limiting their growth.

- While women business owners in Vietnam are optimistic about their business' potential for growth over the next two years, they are less optimistic about their own firm's prospects than about the future growth of the country's economy. This finding is somewhat unusual compared to other surveys among business owners internationally,² and is an indication that many women business owners in Vietnam are experiencing a number of barriers that are holding them back from realizing their full potential.

1 See, for example, Center for Women's Business Research, [Styles of Success](#), Gilligan, Carol, [In a Different Voice](#), and Orser, Barbara, "Estimating the Impact of a Gender-based Training Program."

2 See especially business confidence indices from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, the National Federation of Independent Business (U.S.), and Center for Women's Business Research.

- From other responses in the survey, the major barriers to future growth would appear to be: lack of basic business management skills, lack of financial management skills, laws and regulations that are hampering economic growth overall, and finding and keeping good quality employees. Women who own larger businesses are more likely to be expressing these concerns, which indeed may be limiting their ability to grow their firms, and therefore expand Vietnam's employment base.
- In addressing the special needs of women business owners in Vietnam, the women surveyed would strongly support the establishment of a special governmental advisory board for women's business development issues, so that their voices can be heard in policy deliberations.
- Women business owners surveyed are also eager to meet more regularly with other women business owners, to share ideas and experiences and to learn from one another. Many already rely on other business owners as informal mentors; more formal women's business networks would strengthen the women's business community. The lack of formal and more extensive networks for women business owners in Vietnam is another element which is limiting the growth potential of these businesses.

Access to financing is as much about education as about capital.

- The majority of women business owners surveyed say they have enough capital for their business growth needs, and nearly half currently have bank credit, yet few have been able to reinvest business earnings for growth. This indicates that many firms may not be growing as strongly as they could be, and could therefore be undercapitalized.
- In response to several questions in the survey, women business owners clearly indicate that they need better financial management skills. This would signify that specific training and technical assistance in the areas of financial management and using capital for business growth could yield significant results. It could move women business owners up the financial "value chain," decreasing their reliance on informal sources of capital and enhancing their relationships with financial institutions.
- Regarding access to finance for women entrepreneurs, one recommendation made by the survey respondents was for national policymakers to consider setting up special loan funds or guarantee schemes for small, women-owned businesses.

Women business owners in Vietnam want to learn more about international trade opportunities.

- Another area of potential business growth lies in pursuing international trade opportunities. Nearly one-third of survey respondents are already importing or exporting goods or services for their business, and accessing new markets at home and abroad is one of the most highly ranked issues in the survey.



- Many of the women business owners surveyed are eager to learn more about how to get involved in doing business abroad. Respondents note that the availability of specific training on accessing new markets would be particularly helpful for their business' future growth.

The women business owners surveyed represent a wide range of businesses from every region in the country. Their firms are likely larger and more well-established than the average woman-owned firm in the country.

- The women business owners responding to this survey are the owners of established, substantial business enterprises. Most have been in business for five or more years - 39% for ten or more years - they have an average of 67.7 full-time employees and 24.9 part-time employees. Even though the majority of these businesses (63%) are operating out of their homes, 62% had turnover of 1 billion or more Vietnamese Dong in 2004, with 21% having over 10 billion.
- Looking at the personal characteristics of those surveyed finds that an 80% majority of the women surveyed are married, and their average household size (including spouse, children, parents or other relatives) is 5.1 individuals. Fifteen percent (15%) of these women are under 35, 31% are 35 to 44, 38% are 45 to 54, and 14% are 55 or older. These women business owners are well-educated. Just 12% have only a primary level of education, while 25% have secondary schooling, 27% some post-secondary education, and fully 34% have a university or graduate degree.

The women entrepreneurs who responded to the survey made the following policy and programmatic recommendations:

The women business owners interviewed in both the survey and focus group discussions indicate a strong desire for more policies and programs focused on business development. Indeed, the lack of formal programs may be limiting the growth of women-owned businesses. In Vietnam's impending Gender Equality Law, it is recommended that detailed consideration be given to promoting women's enterprise development - with special emphasis on access to entrepreneurial education and training, access to capital, and access to new markets.

- Throughout the survey, women business owners express a strong desire for formal education on business management issues - not only on general business management skills but in the areas of financial management and accessing new markets. Survey respondents suggest that development and funding of entrepreneurial education and training programs for women be a part of the new law.



- It is further recommended that business training that recognizes women's learning styles, with a greater need for relationship-based rather than transactional learning, be developed. So, too, some special programs focused on the owners of larger, more established firms should be considered, in addition to providing training and education to pre-start-up and start-up firms.
- Access to start-up and growth capital is another important element of governmental assistance. Survey respondents have suggested that either in the Gender Equality Law, or elsewhere, consideration to targeted loan or loan guarantee schemes for women entrepreneurs be established.

Women business owners in Vietnam need more opportunities for networking and forming mentoring relationships. Regular fora to create these opportunities should be established and supported.

- Women business owners surveyed are eager to meet more regularly with other women business owners, to share ideas and experiences and to learn from one another. The establishment and expansion of clubs or organizations specifically for women business owners should be encouraged, with some support from the Gender Equality Law.
- In other countries, there are often regional or national conferences for women business owners, with educational programming, and sometimes with awards recognizing business achievements. Women entrepreneurs suggested that a regular series of conferences, perhaps annually, would help develop a sense of community among women business owners in Vietnam, and raise public awareness of their achievements and contributions to the country.

Women's entrepreneurship in Vietnam needs a formal home, such as an office for women's business development programs, a women's business advisory council, or both.

- When programs are developed after the passage of the Gender Equality Law, consideration should be given to housing the responsibility and oversight for those initiatives in one office devoted to women's business issues, as opposed to being scattered throughout existing government offices. Such an office, with a programmatic portfolio, could possibly be established as a part of the Gender Equality Law.
- In addressing the special needs of women business owners in Vietnam, the women surveyed would strongly support the establishment of a special government advisory board for women's business development issues, so that their voices can be heard in ongoing policy deliberations. Such advisory groups have proven invaluable in other countries when developing and implementing policies to support women's entrepreneurship, and in establishing an ongoing dialogue as policies and programs are modified or expanded.