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Women Business Owners  
in Vietnam:  
**A National Survey**

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This report was written primarily by Julie Weeks (consultant and CEO of Womenable, Inc.), with contributions from Froniga Greig (consultant) and Thi Trinh Nguyen (MPDF intern). The project was managed by Huong Thien Nguyen (MPDF) and Jozefina Cutura (GEM), under the supervision of Trang Nguyen (MPDF) and Amanda Ellis (GEM). My Thi Nguyen (MPDF), Trung Thanh Duong (MPDF), Rashmi Pendse (MPDF) and Catherine Hue-Bi (IFC Africa Department) also contributed.

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## 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 countries<sup>1</sup> 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,<sup>2</sup> 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.

## Important Business Concerns

Both individual-level business skills needs and broader business environment issues are at the top of the list of concerns of women business owners in Vietnam. When presented with a list of 15 important business concerns, the following individual-level concerns rank highest:

Quality of employees/Finding and keeping good employees	80% very/extremely important
Learning financial management skills to grow your business	69% very/extremely important
Low efficiency and productivity	61% very/extremely important

These three concerns are cited as among the most important business concerns among all of the women business owners surveyed, regardless of business size, industry, region or age of the business owner. However, not unexpectedly, the issue of finding and keeping employees rises in importance along with the size of the business, as do concerns with efficiency and productivity.

"Private companies like us face a lot of problems in terms of human resource management. It's very difficult to recruit and retain good people. Typically, those who are inexperienced or incapable stay, while the good ones leave."

Learning financial management skills is likewise important to all business owners regardless of size and industry of firm, or the age of the owner. There are some regional differences, however. Women business owners in the northern regions of

the country outside of Hanoi (Red River Delta and North Mountain) show the greatest concern with this issue - with fully 93% (versus 69% nationwide) saying this is a very or extremely important concern.

Vietnamese women business owners also point to the external environment when citing important business issues. These issues related to government policy and access to business development services are of greatest concern:

Laws and regulations that hamper your business' growth	67% very/extremely important
Access to new markets, such as international trade or selling to new kinds of customers	67% very/extremely important
Gaining access to technology for your business	63% very/extremely important
Access to finance for your business	63% very/extremely important
Access to training and technical assistance to learn business and management skills	62% very/extremely important

These issues are of top importance among most women business owners, regardless of the size or industry of their firms. There are some interesting differences to point out, however. The owners of larger firms are more cognizant of the importance of business laws and regulations, and show

greater interest in moving into new markets. In addition, business owners in Hanoi and the northern part of the country are more concerned than are women business owners in the rest of the country with these issues - especially with the issues of access to finance, training and technical assistance, and new markets.

"The government is still applying 'one size fits all' rules for all enterprises."

Of moderate importance to the women business owners surveyed is the issue of access to property or land. Nearly half (48%) of women business owners across the country say it is a very or extremely important issue, 18% say it is somewhat important, and 28% think it not very or not at all important. This level of concern does not vary significantly by size of firm, industry or ethnic background of the owner, but regionally land access issues are of highest concern in the northern regions (Red River Delta and North Mountain), with 67% saying it is a very or extremely important issue, compared with 48% nationally.

The high cost of public services such as electricity, water and telephone service is another issue of moderate importance, with 42% saying it is very or extremely important, 23% somewhat important, and 31% not very or not at all important. Concern with this issue is somewhat higher in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City compared with the rest of the country.

Less important to women business owners are issues related to corruption - such as the need to make business payoffs (60% say it is not an important concern) or corruption among government officials (50% say this is not an important issue), the issue of prejudice against women (just 27% rate this issue very or extremely important, while 54% say it is not important), and the high cost of labor (35% say it is important, while 31% feel it is not an important concern). There is not a significantly higher level of concern with any of these issues by region, industry, size of firm, nor by the age or ethnic background of the business owner.

When asked if there were any other pressing issues in addition to the 15 issues tested, just 13% of respondents added an additional concern. Most were single responses; the only additional issues of note were "tax policies/high tax rates" (11 responses, or 2% of respondents), "inadequate local economic development assistance or policies" (6 responses, or 1% of respondents), and "inconsistent application of economic policies" (3 responses, or <1% of respondents).

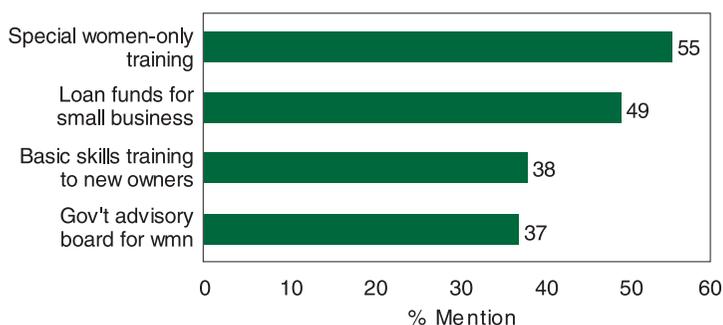
"In my opinion, stable policies from the government are important for businesses. The fact that policies change too much negatively affects businesses in many cases."

## Policy Imperatives

When asked in what specific areas the Vietnamese government should offer policies and programs to aid in the growth of women-owned businesses across the country, four key issues rise to the top

### Women Business Owners Seek Focused Programs, Policy Input

Top Three Choices for Policy Action



of the respondents' "wish list." First and foremost is special business skills training targeted specifically toward women business owners. From a list of ten possible policy and program areas, this was the clear number one choice, with 55% of survey respondents choosing it as one of the top three areas needing government involvement.

Second on the list is a special loan fund or loan guarantee scheme for

small business owners, with 49% of women business owners choosing this as one of the top three areas for government intervention.

"The challenge today for Vietnamese women is not that they are discriminated (against), but that they lack influence. There should be real forums for women entrepreneurs to talk. Life always precedes laws. If many people raise their voices, then the law would follow them."

Two issues tied for third place - establishing a special government advisory board for women's business development services (37% choose it as one of the top three issues) and providing basic business skills training for new and prospective business owners (38% top three).

The fact that so many respondents choose general business skill-building in addition to the top choice of training for women only shows how critically important business skills training is to women business owners. Further, the difference between the levels of support for gender-specific versus gender-neutral training indicates that women business owners would place greater value on learning business skills with other women business owners than on training programs that are open to all business owners. Research in other countries<sup>3</sup> has shown that women learn differently from

"We have to rely on the laws to do business, so it is important to have a strong and clear legal system. The government has to stand behind us and protect us. Our government talks a lot, but does not support enterprises much."

men, and value the increased level of sharing and relationship-building that happens during women-centered

<sup>3</sup> 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."



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.

These top choices for policy action are strongly supported across the country by the women surveyed, regardless of region, industry, or size of business. However, business owners in the North region (Red River Delta and North Mountain regions) are much more supportive than average of special women-focused training (73% choose it among their top three areas), and the owners of goods-producing industries are especially interested in loan funds targeted to small businesses, with 57% putting that on their top three list.

Other areas of possible government intervention for small business development are supported somewhat less strongly:

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Establish goals for government purchasing of goods and services from small businesses	28% top three areas for policy intervention
Make it easier for women as well as men to register and transfer property ownership	21% top three areas
Reduce the amount of time it takes to register and start a new business	19% top three areas
Change employment laws to increase business flexibility for hiring and replacing workers	14% top three areas
Reduce the amount of money it takes to register a new business	13% top three areas
Promote business ownership in general with more marketing and public awareness efforts	11% top three areas

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## Business Skill-Building

As previously discussed, obtaining entrepreneurial education and training to build business skills is one of the most pressing concerns of women business owners in Vietnam. It is among the top expressed issues and is also among the top policy recommendations the women's business community would make to public officials to include in the upcoming Gender Equality Law. Clearly,

"I think I lack experience and skills in business management. I wish I had a chance to attend some business management training courses that targeted potential business starters, so that I could feel more confident in running my business."

women business owners in Vietnam would benefit from policies and programs focused on entrepreneurial skill development. This desire is strongly and repeatedly expressed by the respondents of this survey - the owners of largely established firms in

the formal economy. One can certainly surmise that the desire for entrepreneurial skill-building could be even stronger among the women who were not included in the survey population: the owners of smaller firms in the informal sector, as well as those who have not yet started their businesses.

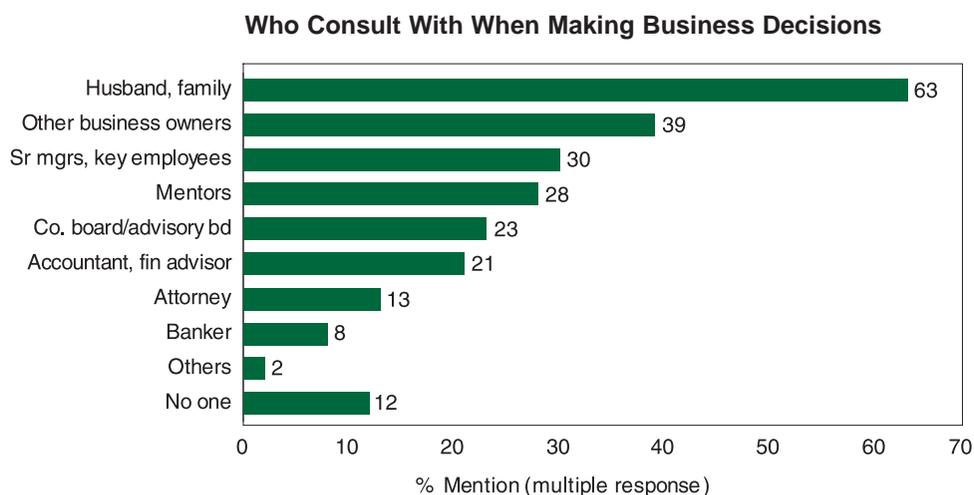
Several more specific questions with respect to business skill-building were asked of survey respondents - namely, how helpful seven distinct types of assistance would be in improving business growth and success. All seven items garnered strong support from survey respondents, with training sessions again ranking at the top of the list.

Type of Assistance	Percent Very / Extremely Helpful
Training sessions on business management and leadership issues	77%
Training sessions on financial management issues	74%
Learning more about how to access new markets, at home and abroad	71%
Learning more about how to use technology to grow your business	71%
Meeting regularly with other women business owners across the country to share ideas/experiences	64%
Learning more about how to get involved in policy issues and advocacy	60%
Organized trips to other countries to meet with other women business owners and their organizations	59%

In addition to general business management and leadership training, specific training sessions on financial management skills, accessing new markets, and using technology were also rated as very or extremely helpful to their business' future growth potential. Clearly, the women business owners of Vietnam are expressing a strong desire and need for direct entrepreneurial education and training. They also express a desire to meet regularly with one another: nearly two-thirds (64%) say they would benefit from networking regularly with other women business owners.

Business owners from all regions of the country rate these issues highly, and there are also few differences by industry or personal characteristics of the owner. However, once again, the owners

### Women Consult With Family, Other Owners When Making Business Decisions



of larger firms - especially firms with 25 or more employees - are the most interested in business management and leadership training. As noted earlier, these owners stated greater concern with issues of managing their firms' growth and with their own management skills. Therefore, it might be useful to consider special, focused entrepreneurial training for the owners of established firms with a significant number of employees in addition to programs focused at the small and start-up level.

Having others to consult with and learn from is an important part of the support network for all business owners, and women business owners in Vietnam are no exception. In the area of business education and learning, the survey also asked women business owners about who they currently rely upon and

"Due to the fact that the vast majority in our business community are men, women entrepreneurs have a lot of difficulties in networking. We need to have (more) communities of businesswomen. From my own experience, I believe that women trust each other, so they can forge business cooperation very easily."

consult when making important business decisions. Nearly all say that they do consult regularly with others when making business decisions - only 12% say that they typically make important decisions themselves.

The most regularly consulted individuals are the women's husbands or other family members, whether or not they are sole owners or share ownership of the business. Fully 63% say that they consult with family members when making important business decisions. Other categories of individuals women business owners consult with when making decisions are: other business owners (39%); senior managers or key employees in the company (30%); informal mentors (28%); members of a company board of directors or advisors (23%); an accountant or financial advisor (21%); an attorney (8%); a banker or loan officer (2%).

The larger the business, the less likely the owner is to consult her family members for advice, and the more likely she is to rely upon senior managers, a board of directors, and other external, formal advisors such as attorneys, accountants and bankers. This is similar to findings among surveys of women and men business owners in other countries.

It is also interesting to note that women under 45 are much more likely than those 45 or older (33% compared to 24%) to say they draw upon informal mentors for advice. Perhaps women 45 or older have fewer contemporaries with business management experience to rely upon for counsel and advice, given Vietnam's relatively recent transition into a market economy.

Access to business financing - and, perhaps just as importantly, learning financial management skills - is a key issue for women business owners in Vietnam. While a majority report that they have enough capital for their current business needs, few are able to reinvest business earnings to grow their business. This is a clear indication that many firms may not be growing as strongly as they could be, and could therefore be undercapitalized.

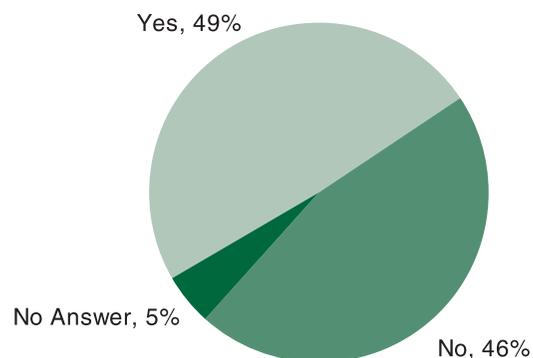
Indeed, because of a lack of financial management skills many women business owners may not realize that lack of sufficient capital is impeding the growth of their businesses. As reported earlier, 63% of survey respondents say that access to business financing is a very or extremely important issue, and fully 69% note that learning financial management skills is a very or extremely important concern.

In follow-up to that general query, survey respondents were asked a series of questions related specifically to access to financing: their major sources of business financing, whether or not they have bank credit, and what difficulties they have encountered, if any, when seeking outside capital for their business over the past year.

First of all, a 56% majority of the women responding to the survey feel that they currently have enough capital for their business' growth and development. Just under half (49%) currently have bank credit - such as a loan or line of credit - and fully 80% used some sort of financing for their business over the past year.

### Half of Women Business Owners Have Bank Credit for Business

#### Women Business Owners with Bank Credit



Not surprisingly, access to capital is easier for more established businesses. Two-thirds (68%) of firms with 25 or more employees currently have business credit, as do 68% of firms with revenues of \$10 billion+ VND (the equivalent to approximately \$630,000 U.S. dollars). At the other end of the size spectrum, just 36% of businesses with fewer than five employees have business credit. Similarly, just 39% of firms with less than \$1 billion VND in revenues (approximately \$63,000 USD) have access to business credit.

The most frequent source of financing used recently was a commercial bank loan, with 52% drawing upon that source of capital during the past year (again, with 49% currently having bank credit. Another 47% drew upon private sources, such as personal savings, friends and family, for their financing needs.

However, just 23% say they were able to reinvest business earnings to fuel business growth - a much lower figure than that typically seen among women business owners surveyed in more developed market economies.<sup>4</sup> This could be an indication that the businesses are not yet profitable enough to generate funds for reinvestment - or perhaps that business profits are being used for purposes other than reinvestment in the business.

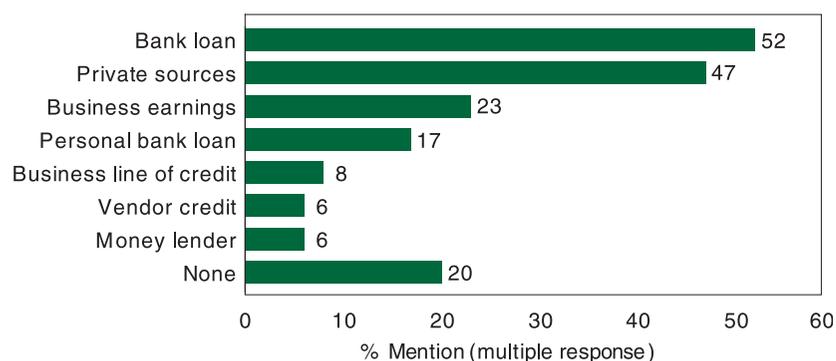
Other sources of financing used by survey respondents over the past 12 months include: a personal bank loan, 17%; business line of credit, 8%; vendor credit, 6%; money lender, 6%; credit cards, 2%; and a micro-finance institution loan, 1%.

When asked if they had encountered any difficulties when seeking outside financing over the past year, half of the respondents did report at least one difficulty. The three most significant barriers to

obtaining financing were: that they found the process for obtaining external financing too complicated (29%); that interest rates were too high (28%); and that they were denied financing due to a lack of collateral (20%). Just 3% said that they perceived any sort of gender discrimination while seeking capital.

### Women Using a Variety of Capital Sources, But Reinvestment of Earnings Low

#### Sources of Financing Used in Past Year



A look at the responses to these capital-related questions by major subgroups finds that women business owners in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City and the South are less likely than women in the North and Central regions of the country to have access to bank credit. Just 44% of the women business owners surveyed in Hanoi have a current loan or line of credit with a bank, as do 47% in Ho Chi Minh City and 48% in the South. Majorities of women business owners in the North (56%) and Central (55%) regions say they have bank credit available to them. There are no significant differences by industry or age of firm.

There are some significant differences by age of firm with respect to the full range of sources used for business financing. As one would expect, a firm's reliance on the entrepreneur's personal savings and personal bank loans decreases as the firm matures. Sixty percent (60%) of women who

<sup>4</sup> This may not only be due to the relative youth of the market economy in Vietnam, but also to the age of the businesses themselves as compared to those owned by women surveyed in other countries. For similar questioning, see research conducted by Center for Women's Business Research in several European and Latin American economies.

have owned their firms for less than five years have used personal savings to fuel business growth over the past year, compared to just 45% among women who have owned their businesses for 10 or more years. And 29% of women with

younger firms have drawn upon a personal bank loan, while only 13% of women with older firms have done so. Conversely, the share relying on commercial credit increases with firm age - from 43% among women owning firms less than five years old to 56% among women whose firms are 10 or more years old.

"It is complicated to borrow from the bank. You need to have assets like land or houses, and in many cases the bank values your assets at less than their market value. As a result, the amount you can borrow is less than what you expect."

However, women who have been in business for 10 or more years are not more likely to be reinvesting business earnings to fuel their business' growth than their less experienced counterparts. Just 26% of women who have owned their firms for 10 or more years are reinvesting business earnings to finance their firm's growth - essentially the same level as the 28% seen among women who have owned their firms for less than five years. And, while the level of reinvestment of business earnings does rise with business size - from 17% among women business owners with no employees to 27% among women who employ 25 or more full-time employees - this level of reinvestment of business earnings is still lower than expected. This may be an indication that lack of access to capital - or a lack of knowledge of how to use capital - could be limiting the growth potential of many women-owned firms in Vietnam.

## Access to International Markets

Another important issue for women business owners in Vietnam is gaining access to international markets. The women business owners surveyed are eager to learn more about how to access the international marketplace, and nearly three in ten are doing so already - currently trading in an average of three countries.

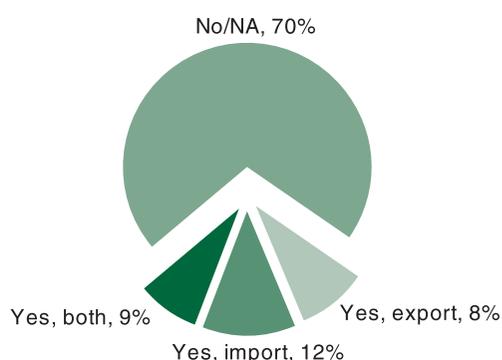
"I'll have to make time to travel abroad to take training courses. I want to improve my market research knowledge and English language skills. I want to be able to talk to my foreign partners without having to go through an interpreter."

Two-thirds (67%) of the women business owners surveyed report that gaining access to new markets such as international markets is a very or extremely important concern, and 71% state that learning more about how to access international markets would be very or extremely helpful to their business' growth and success.

At the present time, 29% of women business owners in Vietnam are importing or exporting their goods or services - 8% are exporting, 12% are importing, and 9% are doing both.

### Nearly One in Three Women Business Owners are Involved in International Trade

#### Businesses in International Trade



The women who are involved in international trade own larger enterprises, are more likely to own goods-producing rather than service-producing businesses, and are more likely to reside in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City than are the women whose firms are not importing or exporting. A 60% majority of women who own firms with 25 or more employees are involved in international trade, compared with just 19% of those

with fewer than five employees. Nearly half (47%) who own goods-producing firms either import or export materials for their business, while just 24% of service businesses are trading globally. Fully 70% of women-owned firms surveyed in Hanoi, and 56% in Ho Chi Minh City, are trading internationally, compared to just 12% in the rest of the country.

In addition, younger businesses are more likely to be involved in international trade than are firms of longer standing. Forty-two percent (42%) of women who have started their firms within the last five years are trading internationally, compared to 29% of those who have owned their businesses for 10 or more years are involved in international trade. This could be due to the fact that Vietnamese policies are now more open to trade, and have encouraged newer firms to focus more on the international marketplace.



Among those who are involved in international trade, most are selling or buying in more than one country. Just 30% of international traders are only involved with one other country, 22% are involved with two, 15% with three, and 33% with four or more. On average, women business owners in Vietnam who trade internationally have business in three other countries.

The single largest trading partner of these women is the United States, with 40% doing business there. Other significant trading partners are largely in the region: China, 35%; Singapore, 34%; Japan, 30%; Taiwan, 27%; Germany, 27%; South Korea, 23%; Malaysia, 22%; and Australia, 21%. Another 14% are doing business in Hong Kong, and 10% are trading in the United Kingdom.

## Access to Technology

Technology pervades much of life around the world today, and is an important tool for increasing business efficiency and productivity. Women business owners in Vietnam are definitely taking advantage of many technology tools, yet they are anxious to learn more. Nearly two-thirds (63%) state that gaining access to technology is a very or extremely important issue for their business at the present time, and nearly three-quarters (71%) feel that it would be very or extremely helpful for their business to learn more about how to use technology to fuel business growth.

The vast majority of women business owners in Vietnam are already using some of the basic technology tools in their businesses. Fully 83% use a cellular phone, 75% have one or more computers, 63% have a multi-line phone system, and 61% have a fax machine.<sup>5</sup>

"My company provides accountancy services. We have only 4 computers but 20 accountants, so most of the accounting work is paper-based, which takes a lot of time. We want to buy more computers and train our staff to use computers to do accounting works. It would be more professional."

Women business owners are much less likely to have their computers networked together, however, or to be utilizing the Internet regularly. Just 35% of women business owners surveyed report that they have a local area network, and just 37% use the Internet regularly. Nearly one-quarter (24%) of women business owners do say that they have a web site for their business.

Cell phone use is prevalent among women business owners in Vietnam - as it is in many other countries - regardless of the size or location of their business. Owners of firms with less than five employees, as well as women who live outside of the country's two major metropolitan areas, are nearly as likely to have cellular phones as those with larger firms or those who live in cities. However, the sophistication of their office systems increases with business size. For example, while just 29% of women who have fewer than five employees have a fax machine in their business, fully 89% of those with 25 or more employees has a fax machine. And while 70%+ of all women business owners, regardless of business size, use computers in their businesses, just 8% of the smallest firms have them networked together in a local area network, compared to 66% of the largest firms.

When it comes to using the Internet and building web sites for their business, size and location of firm are important factors, as is industry. The majority of women business owners surveyed who are located in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City say they are regular users of the Internet, while one-quarter or fewer of the women located elsewhere are regular Internet users. This same disparity is seen with respect to whether or not their firms have web sites: half of those in the cities have a web site for their business, while 16% or fewer of women-owned firms located elsewhere have an online

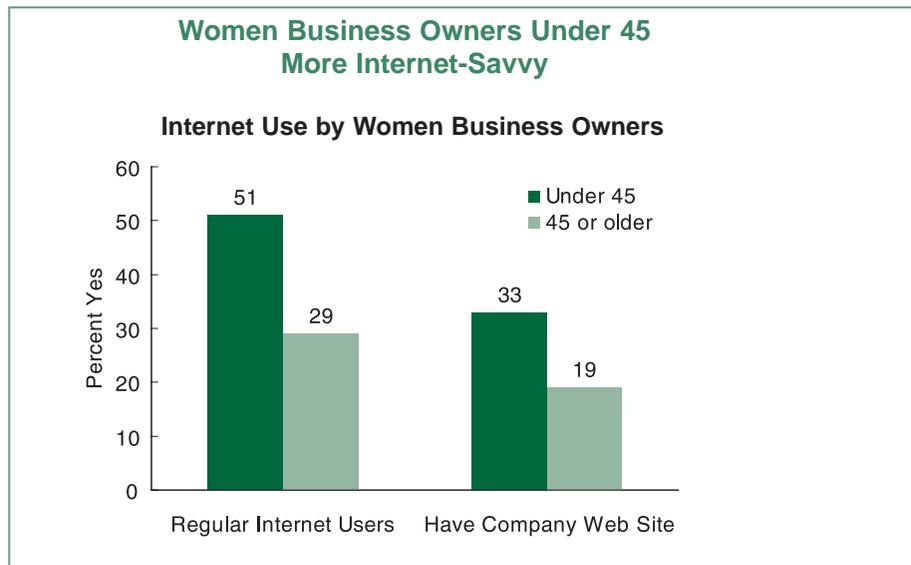
<sup>5</sup> As noted in the methodology section of this report, due to the nature of the survey sample, survey respondents are more likely to be the owners of larger, more established businesses, and less likely to be the owners of part-time, seasonal or informal businesses.



presence. Owners of firms in goods-producing industries are more likely to be regular users of the Internet (45% compared to 38% of the owners of service businesses), and they are more likely to have web sites for their businesses (32% compared to 23% of services firms).

While the owners of larger businesses are more likely be regular users of the Internet and to have a web site - the level of online activity varies even more greatly by the age of the business owner. Just 29% of women business owners aged 45 or older call themselves regular Internet users, and just 19% have a web site for their business. However, fully 51% of women business owners under 45 are regular Internet users, and 33% have a web site for their business. This confirms what has been seen in other research in other countries - younger people are frequently more technology-savvy.<sup>6</sup>

In summary, while most women business owners in Vietnam are taking advantage of basic technology tools (such as computers and cell phone technology), they still seek additional knowledge and assistance to take information and



computer technology (ICT) to the next level in their businesses. Access to technology, particularly access to the Internet, is especially pronounced in the rural areas of the country.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, a 2001 household survey conducted in Hong Kong (Findings of the "Household Survey on Information Technology Usage and Penetration" and the "Annual Survey on Information Technology Usage and Penetration in the Business Sector" for 2001 released), and a Eurostat survey among households in Spain ([http://www.ine.es/en/metodologia/t25/t253045066ana04\\_en.pdf](http://www.ine.es/en/metodologia/t25/t253045066ana04_en.pdf)).

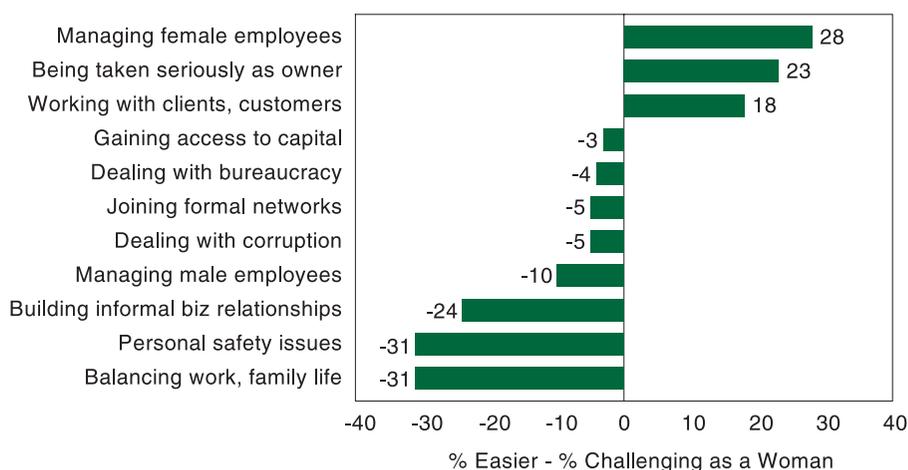


## The Special Challenge of Being a *Woman* Business Owner

Because of the multiple roles that women play in society, social and cultural norms that may exist, or even legal constraints - women frequently face steeper challenges in starting, operating and growing business enterprises. Some survey questions were asked to assess the perceptions of women business owners in Vietnam regarding some of these challenges. While these are perceptions among survey respondents rather than an assessment of legal or regulatory systems, this line of inquiry reveals that, while women business owners in Vietnam admit that some issues are more challenging for them as women - they feel that, on balance, their gender is not a net negative influence on their business.

### Balancing Work and Family Life Seen as a Greater Challenge for Women

#### Personal Safety, Networking Also More Difficult But Being Taken Seriously is Not



Primary among the perceived challenges these women feel they face as women business owners is, not surprisingly, the issue of balancing work and family life. Thirty-eight percent (38%) say this issue is more challenging for them as women compared to just 7% who say this issue is easier for women - a 31-point "challenge gap."<sup>7</sup> This challenge is raised frequently by women in both quantitative and qualitative research around the world. Among these survey respondents in Vietnam, women under 45 are most likely to feel the pressure of their dual roles as entrepreneur and family caretaker - probably because they are most likely to be the parents of younger children. Fully 42% of women under 45 say that balancing work and family issues is a greater challenge for them as a woman, compared to just 6% who say it is easier - a 36-point challenge gap. In comparison, a lesser 35% of women 45 or older say it is more difficult

<sup>7</sup> The term "challenge gap" refers to the difference between the share of respondents who say a particular issue is a greater challenge to them as women business owners and the share who say that a particular issue is easier for them as women business owners. For example, 38% of those surveyed say that it is more challenging for them, as women, to balance work and family life, while just 7% say it is easier. Thus, there is a 31-point difference - with more saying it is challenging than easier - which can then be termed a "challenge gap."

for women to balance work and family, while 9% say it is easier - a 26-point gap.

Survey respondents also perceive personal safety to be a greater challenge for them than to their male counterparts, with 36% saying this is a greater challenge

for them as women compared to just 5% who say that this issue is easier for women - another 31-point gap. Women under 45 years of age and women who live in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City are more likely to cite personal safety as a greater challenge than are older women or women who live outside the two major cities.

"Everybody knows that 60 to 70 percent of business transactions or contracts are signed with state partners over party tables. Men have more advantages than women in the sense that they can drink and make outside contacts. Women can also invite partners to eat or drink, but it is still constrained. First, we are Asian women, so we cannot do that. Second, we can't compete with men in terms of drinking capacity. It may be a disadvantage in doing business."

This finding should not suggest that women feel that their status as business owners puts them in harm's way compared to women who are not business owners, but instead suggests that they do feel - in general - that women are somewhat more vulnerable than men when it comes to their personal safety. The finding that younger women and women who live in cities feel somewhat more vulnerable is consistent with international statistics that report these populations are more likely to have experienced crime.

Women also perceive the ability to network and form mentoring relationships with other business owners to be a greater challenge because they are women - with 38% saying it is more difficult and 14% easier (a 24-point challenge gap). Networking is a greater challenge for women in goods-producing industries, for women business owners in the two major cities (Hanoi more so than Ho Chi Minh City), and for younger women.

Managing male employees is seen as somewhat more difficult - 22% more difficult versus 12% easier, although fully 55% say it makes no difference. Women business owners under 45 find managing male employees more difficult than do other women - with a 16-point challenge gap on this question. The opinion swings the other way when it comes to managing female employees, with 32% of all survey respondents saying it is easier for them, as women, to manage other women, compared to just 4% who say it is more challenging. Again, a 54% majority says that their gender makes no difference in this regard.

Respondents perceive several other issues as relatively gender-neutral for them as women business owners. The majority of women surveyed say their gender makes no difference in the areas of: dealing with corruption and racketeering (55% no difference), dealing with bureaucracy and paperwork (60%), joining formal networks, like business associations (65%), and gaining access to capital (67%). While these may be important issues for them in running their businesses, the women surveyed do not see these issues as being particularly harder for them because they are women.

One issue that women see as a net advantage due to their gender is working with clients and customers. While a 51% majority say they see no gender difference in this area, 29% state that they feel working with customers is easier for them as women, versus 11% who say it is more challenging - an 18-point "advantage gap."<sup>8</sup> This sentiment is the same among the owners of both service-producing and goods-producing businesses.

On balance, when asked whether being a woman was a net negative, net positive, or made no difference in their business overall, fully 65% say it makes no difference, 17% count it as a positive, and only 6% say it is a net negative factor. Perhaps this is why women business owners in Vietnam largely feel that they are, indeed, taken seriously as business owners. While a 54% majority feel there is no gender difference in "being taken seriously as a business owner," 30% say this is easier as a woman, while only 7% say it is more challenging.

The owners of younger businesses are more likely to say it is a challenge to be taken seriously as a woman compared to the owners of more established firms (13% among women who have owned their firms for less than five years, compared to just 4% of those who have been in business for 10 or more years), as do women in Hanoi compared to other regions of the country (24% of women business owners in Hanoi say it is more challenging to be taken seriously as a woman, compared to less than 10% in all other regions). Despite these small differences, however, the majority of all women, even those in Hanoi and in business for less than five years, say that being a woman does not make it more challenging to be a business owner in Vietnam.

While women business owners in Vietnam, by and large, do feel that they are taken seriously as business owners and they perceive no significant net challenge for them, as women, it is the case - as seen earlier in this report - that women would like more opportunities to network with one another, would like more policy and programmatic attention from the government, and would favor gender-specific entrepreneurial education and training. These findings are not inconsistent. As mentioned earlier, international research has shown that women do learn differently from men, and can benefit from training programs that are gender-specific, and which are more relational than transactional in nature. Therefore, training designed specifically by and for women should not be seen as a reaction to perceived or actual discrimination, but rather as recognition of learning style differences and customer preferences.

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<sup>8</sup> The term "advantage gap" refers to the difference between the share of respondents who say a particular issue is easier for them as women business owners minus the share who say that a particular issue is a greater challenge to them as women business owners. For example, 29% of those surveyed say that it is easier for them, as women, to work with clients and customers, while 11% say it is more challenging to do so as women. Thus, there is an 18-point difference - with more saying it is easier than challenging - which can then be termed an "advantage gap."

The women business owners surveyed are definitely looking to the future, with more plans for growth and expansion than for the status quo, but there are a significant number who appear somewhat hesitant about the future. In addition, women business owners are more optimistic about the growth prospects of the national economy as a whole than for their own business, which suggests that they are, indeed, a population in need of policy and programmatic attention.

Over the course of the next 12 months, women business owners in Vietnam plan to embark on several key growth strategies. Fully two-thirds (67%) plan on increasing capital investment in their business, 53% would like to expand into new markets, 45% say they will be hiring new employees, 36% will seek support from the government, and 30% plan on seeking a

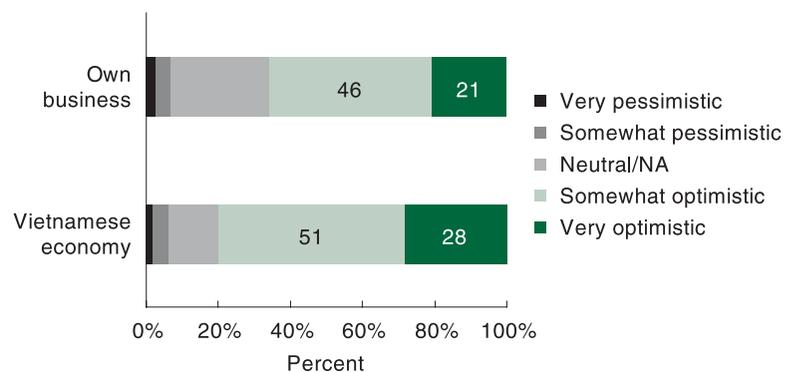
foreign partner. Among the most expansion-minded are women in Hanoi and the North - over 80% of whom are planning to increase capital investment and over 60% of whom are planning to hire additional employees. Women in Vietnam's major cities (53% in Hanoi, 57% in Ho Chi Minh City) are those most likely to be seeking a foreign partner in the coming year. As seen earlier in the report, these are the firms already most likely to be engaged in international trade.

Another 19% say they will keep investment and employment in their business about the same and will adopt a "wait and see" approach. Very few women surveyed are considering any business contraction activities. Just 2% say they will be reducing employment, 2% will close stores or branches, and 1% will reduce capital investment.

While most women business owners are looking to the future with growth in mind and on their active agenda, they are nonetheless somewhat less optimistic about their own business' prospects over the next two years than they are about the country as a whole - which is not a typical finding when compared to other surveys querying business owners in this manner.<sup>9</sup> While two-thirds (67%) of the

### Women Business Owners Less Optimistic About Own Business Prospects Than About National Economy

Outlook on Prospects for Growth Over Next 2 Years



<sup>9</sup> 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.

women business owners are optimistic about the growth and development of their business over the next two years (46% somewhat optimistic and 21% very optimistic), over three-quarters (79%) are optimistic about the prospects for growth for the Vietnamese economy as a whole (51% somewhat optimistic and 28% very optimistic). This shows that women business owners are generally somewhat more hesitant about their own personal future than about the country's prospects.

Even new business owners - those whose firms are less than five years old - are more optimistic about the country's economic prospects than the prospects of their own firms, and these are typically among the most optimistic business owners. In fact, only in Hanoi are the women business owners more optimistic about their own business prospects than the country's economic future (86% are optimistic about their own firms, 72% about the country).

This finding, coupled with the clarion calls seen elsewhere in the survey for: more business skills training; help with increasing their financial management skills; stronger capitalization to increase business earnings reinvestment; and aid in opening doors to new markets suggests that the women business owners of Vietnam need policies and programs to address these issues, and that the future growth and development of the women's business sector in Vietnam is dependent upon policy action in these important areas.

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 - and 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% earned 1 billion or more Vietnamese Dong in turnover in 2004 (approximately \$63,000 US dollars), with 21% earning over 10 billion (approximately \$630,000 USD).

Survey respondents come from across the country. The largest concentration is from Ho Chi Minh City (24%), while 11% are from Hanoi. The remaining respondents come from across the regions, with the largest numbers in the more populous Mekong Delta region, South Central Vietnam, and the East Southern region.

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 - so a substantial number of other individuals relies upon their business income.<sup>10</sup> 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.

Ethnically, few women business owners surveyed are not Vietnamese in origin. Just 6% are ethnic minorities - 4% are Chinese, less than 1% are Khmer, and less than 1% are of some other ethnic background.

The table below summarizes the business and personal characteristics of the survey population.

Business and Personal Characteristics of Survey Respondents			
Business Characteristics		Personal Characteristics	
<u>Years in Business</u>		<u>Age</u>	
Less than five years	17%	Under 25	1%
5 - 9 years	40%	25 - 34	14%
10+ years	39%	35 - 44	31%
No answer	4%	45 - 54	38%
Average # years	8.6%	55 or older	14%
		No answer	2%
<u>Industry</u>		<u>Education</u>	
Agriculture	4%	Primary level only	12%
Resource development (oil, gas, coal)	3%	Secondary level/Vocational	25%
Non-durable manufacturing (food, clothing)	14%	Some post-secondary	27%
Durable manufacturing (machines, steel, tires)	6%	University/Institute degree	28%
Wholesale/retail trade	40%	Post graduate work or degree	6%
Services - travel/tourism	7%	No answer	3%
Business services	14%		
Personal services	2%		
Technology/ICT	2%		
Other	16%		

<sup>10</sup> The wording of the question asked how many people were living at home who were dependent upon the income generated by the business.

<b>Business and Personal Characteristics of Survey Respondents (cont)</b>			
<b>Business Characteristics</b>		<b>Personal Characteristics</b>	
<u>Number of Full-time/Contract Employees</u>		<u>Marital Status</u>	
0	13%	Married	80%
1 - 4	24%	Single, never married	7%
5 - 9	17%	Divorced	5%
10 - 24	21%	Separated	1%
25+	26%	Widowed	5%
Average # employees	67.7%	No answer	2%
<u>Number of Part-Time / Seasonal Employees</u>		<u>Number of Persons Dependent Upon Business Income</u>	
0	49%	None	5%
1 - 4	14%	One additional person	8%
5 - 9	6%	Two additional people	20%
10 - 24	15%	Three additional people	15%
25+	16%	Four additional people	17%
Average # employees	24.9%	Five additional people	9%
		Six additional people	10%
		Seven or more additional people	10%
		No answer	6%
		Average # dependents	4.1%
<u>Business Revenues, 2004</u>		<u>Ethnic Origin</u>	
Under 100M VND	7%	Vietnamese	94%
100-499M VND	15%	Chinese	4%
500-999M VND	11%	Khmer	<1%
1-4.9B VND	28%	Other	<1%
5-9.9B VND	13%		
10-49.9B VND	16%		
50B+ VND	5%		
No answer	4%		
<u>Location of Business</u>			
Home-based	63%		
Non home-based	35%		
<u>Region</u>			
Hanoi	11%		
Red River Delta region	4%		
North Mountain region	2%		
North Central region	5%		
South Central region	12%		
Central Highland region	4%		
Ho Chi Minh City	24%		
East Southern region	12%		
Mekong Delta region	23%		
No answer	4%		

The women entrepreneurs who responded to this survey offered a number of policy and programmatic actions for consideration, including:

**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.



The findings in this report are based on a quantitative survey conducted among a convenience sample of women business owners in Vietnam. Qualitative focus group discussions and in-depth interviews were also conducted among 82 women business owners (as noted below). All of the women who participated in the focus groups or interviews also filled out a survey questionnaire. Some of the verbatim quotes from the women who participated in the focus group discussions are included in this report to add first-person flavor to the survey findings. A report focused on the qualitative discussions is being published separately.

For the quantitative survey, a 39-question, 75-item survey was mailed to a sample of 2,160 women business owners - gleaned from a random sample of 4,000 names drawn from several lists from Chambers of Commerce, industry associations, and the Vietnam Women's Union, which totaled 13,000 registered businesses. Out of the sample of 4,000, there were 2,160 records with complete mailing addresses. Surveys were mailed to these 2,160 business owners in late July, 2005 and, by the time of the survey cut-off in late August, 473 responses were received. This represents a 21.9% response rate - an excellent rate of return for a survey of this type.

A survey of N=473 responses has an error rate of +/- 4.5%, at a 95% level of confidence. This means that, 95 times out of 100, survey responses will be within 4.5% of true population values.

The experiences of 82 women were collected during in depth interviews and focus group discussions. Eight focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 63 participants selected from a range of industries and locations. All participants owned formal sector businesses, with the exception of one discussion in Da Nang which included representatives from the informal sector. The focus group discussions were conducted in four different locations: Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang and Can Tho. Each discussion was approximately 2 hours in duration.

In addition, a total of 19 in-depth interviews were conducted with women entrepreneurs at their workplaces. The average length of these individual interviews was 2 hours. The interviewees were selected through various channels. Women's clubs and business associations recommended some women, while others were found through word of mouth. Four of the women also participated in focus group discussions.

Of course, given that this survey and the companion qualitative discussions were not conducted among a truly random sample of all women business owners in Vietnam (since such a list does not exist) - but rather a convenience sample of women business owners who are members of or on the mailing lists of several national associations, or who are registered with the government - the results reported in this summary are likely not representative of all women business owners in Vietnam. It is more likely that the women included in the sample population for this survey are the owners of larger, more well-established businesses, as well as businesses in the formal sector. The owners of smaller firms, part-time or seasonal businesses, and self-employed women in the informal economy are therefore likely to be under-represented in this survey.

## Appendix 1: Survey Cover Letter



Hà Nội ngày 15 tháng 7 năm 2005

V/v: *Khảo sát về doanh nhân nữ Việt Nam*

Kính thưa Bà

Hội Liên hiệp Phụ nữ Việt Nam và Chương trình Phát triển Kinh tế Tư nhân MPDF xin gửi tới bà lời chào trân trọng.

Nhằm phục vụ cho công tác soạn thảo Luật Bình đẳng giới, chúng tôi đang thực hiện một cuộc khảo sát về nhu cầu và những khó khăn, thách thức của doanh nhân nữ Việt Nam trong giai đoạn hiện nay. Xin bà dành chút thời gian điền vào bản câu hỏi gửi kèm theo và gửi thư hoặc fax về địa chỉ:

Nguyễn Thị Mỹ  
Chương trình Phát triển Kinh tế Tư nhân MPDF  
Tầng 3, 63 Lý Thái Tổ, Hà Nội  
ĐT: (04) 8247892; Fax: (04) 8247898

Chúng tôi xin gửi tới Quý doanh nghiệp một món quà thay lời cảm ơn. Mời quý doanh nghiệp xem chi tiết ở phần cuối của bảng câu hỏi. Chúng tôi rất mong nhận được sự phản hồi kịp thời từ phía quý Doanh nghiệp để thu thập được những ý kiến xác đáng nhất cho quá trình soạn thảo Luật Bình đẳng giới.

Xin chân thành cảm ơn

Kính thư



Nguyễn Thị Thanh Hoà  
Phó chủ tịch  
Hội Liên hiệp Phụ nữ Việt Nam



Nguyễn Phương Quỳnh Trang  
Giám đốc, Phát triển Môi trường Kinh doanh  
MPDF

## Appendix 2: Survey Questionnaire

### Vietnam Women Business Owners Survey

#### Question Results

(N=473 Responses, Numbers are percents unless otherwise specified)

As a woman business owner, you are an important force in the economy - not only in Vietnam, but around the world. We are interested in knowing more about you, about your business, and your opinions on how the government can help businesses in Vietnam reach their full potential.

Please take a few minutes to sit down and complete this short questionnaire - it should take only about 15 minutes - and return it in the postage-paid envelope. Hundreds of other business owners like yourself are also receiving this survey. The results of this research will provide input into important policy discussions in government, that will help small businesses in Vietnam grow and prosper.

Please be assured that your answers to this survey are completely confidential. There is no information in this survey that can identify you or your business. And, as special thanks for completing and returning the survey, you will receive a special gift.

If you own more than one business, please refer to your primary business only when answering this survey. For each question, please mark the answer or answers that come closest to describing your situation, opinion or assessment.

#### ***First, we'd like to learn about some of the issues you are currently facing in your business...***

1. What is your outlook on the prospects for growth of the Vietnamese economy over the next two years? Would you say you are ...?

28	Very optimistic
51	Somewhat optimistic
12	Neutral
4	Somewhat pessimistic
2	Very pessimistic
2	No answer
  
2. What is your outlook for the growth and development of your own business over the next two years? Would you say you are ...?

21	Very optimistic
46	Somewhat optimistic
25	Neutral
4	Somewhat pessimistic
3	Very pessimistic
2	No answer

## 3. How important are each of the following issues for you in your business at the present time?

Listed in descending order of importance

	Not at all important (1)	Not very important (2)	Somewhat important (3)	Very important (4)	Extremely important (5)	No answer	Avg. (1-5)
b. Quality of employees, finding and keeping good employees	2	8	7	40	40	4	4.14
n. Learning financial management skills to grow your business	2	9	14	43	26	6	3.87
m. Laws and regulations that hamper your business' growth	3	13	9	36	31	8	3.85
j. Low efficiency and productivity.	3	11	12	35	26	14	3.82
l. Access to new markets, such as international trade or selling to new kinds of customers	5	10	12	39	28	6	3.81
k. Access to training and technical assistance to learn business management skills	4	11	17	39	23	7	3.71
d. Gaining access to technology for your business	3	11	18	43	20	6	3.70
a. Access to finance for your business	2	18	11	45	18	7	3.62
c. Access to property and land	4	24	18	34	14	6	3.32
e. High cost of public services (electricity, water, telephones, etc)	2	29	23	30	12	5	3.22
i. High cost of labor	6	25	25	27	8	9	3.06
f. Competition from other countries	17	24	12	21	13	14	2.88
h. Corruption among government officials	29	21	10	14	13	13	2.55
o. Prejudices against women	22	32	11	18	9	8	2.55
g. Racketeering and business payoffs/bribes	28	32	14	10	6	11	2.26

4. Are there any more important issues in your business at the present time that were not listed above? If so, please write them below. (N=61 responses, most single topic)
- High tax rates/Tax policies (11 responses)
- Insufficient local economic development policies (6 responses)
- Inconsistent oversight/administration of economic policy (3 responses)
5. During the next 12 months, will your business ...? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY)
- 67 Increase capital investment
- 53 Expand into new markets
- 45 Hire new employees
- 36 Seek special aid or support from the government
- 30 Seek out a foreign partner
- 2 Reduce employment
- 2 Close stores or branches
- 1 Reduce capital investment
- 19 Wait and see, keeping employment and investment about the same
6. Which of the following comes closest to describing your goal for your business over the next two years?
- 13 To maintain my business as a part-time venture to supplement household income
- 4 To grow my business from a part-time venture to a full-time business
- 35 To maintain my full-time business at its present size and level of activity
- 29 To expand my full-time business by increasing revenues and/or employment
- 14 To expand my full-time business by expanding into new markets
- 2 To sell or close my business
- 4 No answer
7. Over the next few months, national leaders will be considering ways to improve support for small businesses in Vietnam, including some special programs for women's business development. We'd like to get your opinion about what areas these policies should address. From the list below, please check the **TOP THREE** areas that you feel these new business policies should focus on. (N=411)
- 55 Provide special business skills training for women only
- 49 Set up special loan funds or loan guarantee schemes for small businesses
- 38 Provide basic business skills training to new and prospective business owners
- 37 Establish a special government advisory board for women's business development issues

- 28 Establish goals for government purchasing of goods and services from small businesses
- 21 Make it easier for women as well as men to register and transfer property ownership
- 19 Reduce the amount of time it takes to register and start a new business
- 14 Change employment laws to increase business flexibility for hiring and replacing workers
- 13 Reduce the amount of money it takes to register a new business
- 11 Promote business ownership in general with more marketing and public awareness efforts
- <1 Other
- 2 No answer

***We'd like to know if your business is involved in international trade ...***

8. Are you now exporting or importing any goods or services in your business?

- 63 No
- 8 Yes, exporting goods/services
- 12 Yes, importing goods/services
- 9 Yes, both importing and exporting
- 7 No answer

9. (IF YES:) What country or countries are you doing business with? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY) (N=139)

- |    |               |    |                |
|----|---------------|----|----------------|
| 40 | United States | 23 | South Korea    |
| 35 | China         | 22 | Malaysia       |
| 34 | Singapore     | 21 | Australia      |
| 30 | Japan         | 14 | Hong Kong      |
| 27 | Taiwan        | 10 | United Kingdom |
| 27 | Germany       | 46 | Other          |

Number of Countries Doing Business With

- 30 One
- 22 Two
- 15 Three
- 12 Four
- 21 Five or more
- 2.96 Average number of countries

***Please tell us a little bit about how your business uses technology.***

10. Which of the following technology tools do you use in your business? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY)
- 83 Cellular phone(s)
  - 75 A personal computer or computers
  - 63 A multi-line telephone system
  - 61 Fax machine
  - 35 Computers linked together in a local area network
11. How would you describe the level of activity of your business on the Internet?
- 30 We have never used the Internet
  - 29 We use the Internet occasionally
  - 37 We use the Internet regularly
  - 4 No answer
12. Does your company have a Web site?
- 24 Yes
  - 72 No
  - 4 No answer

***Please share with us the types and sources of financing used in your business...***

13. Which of the following types of financing have you used within the last 12 months to meet your capital needs? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY)
- 52 Business/commercial bank loan
  - 47 Private sources (personal savings, friends, family)
  - 23 Earnings of the business
  - 17 Personal bank loan
  - 8 Business line of credit
  - 6 Vendor credit
  - 6 Money lender
  - 2 Credit cards
  - 1 Micro-finance institution loan
  - 0 Venture capital
  - 6 Other sources
  - 20 Used no financing



14. Have you encountered any of the following situations during the past year as you have sought external financing for your business? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY)
- 29 Found the process too complicated
  - 28 Interest rates were too high
  - 20 Denied financing because of lack of collateral
  - 3 Perceived mistreatment due to being a woman
  - 2 Denied financing because of lack of business track record
  - 26 Have not encountered any difficulties
  - 23 Have not sought external financing
15. Do you currently have any form of bank credit, such as a loan or line of credit?
- 49 Yes
  - 46 No
  - 5 No answer
16. Do you feel you have enough capital currently available to you for the continued growth and development of your business?
- 56 Yes
  - 40 No
  - 4 No answer
17. Who do you consult with regularly when making important business decisions? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY)
- 63 Husband or other family members
  - 39 Fellow business owners
  - 30 Senior managers/key employees in your business
  - 28 Informal mentor(s)
  - 23 Company board of directors/advisory board
  - 21 Accountant, financial advisor
  - 13 Attorney
  - 8 Banker/loan officer
  - 2 Others
  - 12 No one, I typically make important decisions myself



## 18. How helpful would each of the following be to you to improve your business' growth and success?

Listed in descending order of helpfulness

	Not at all helpful (1)	Not very helpful (2)	Somewhat helpful (3)	Very helpful (4)	Extremely helpful (5)	No answer	Avg. (1-5)
c. Training sessions on business management and leadership issues	1	5	9	49	28	9	4.07
b. Training sessions on financial management issues	1	4	11	53	21	11	3.98
e. Learning more about how to access new markets, at home and abroad	3	7	9	45	26	10	3.92
d. Learning more about how to use technology to grow your business	2	4	15	50	21	9	3.91
a. Meeting regularly with other women business owners across the country to share ideas/experiences	2	6	20	47	17	9	3.77
f. Learning more about getting involved in policy issues and advocacy	2	8	18	47	13	11	3.70
g. Organized trips to other countries to meet with other women business owners and their organizations	5	11	14	38	21	10	3.67

## 19. For each of the following issues, do you feel that they have been more challenging for you because you are a woman, easier for you, or don't you think there has been any difference due to gender?

	More challenging because a woman (1)	No difference (2)	Easier as a woman (3)	No answer	% Challenging -% Easier
h. Balancing work and family life	38	39	7	15	+31
k. Personal safety issues	36	49	5	10	+31
i. Networking and building informal business relationships with mentors, advisors and other business owners	38	39	14	9	+24
c. Managing male employees	22	55	12	11	+10
j. Dealing with corruption and racketeering	20	55	15	10	+5
b. Joining formal networks, like business associations	15	65	10	12	+5
g. Dealing with bureaucracy and paperwork	17	60	13	11	+4
a. Gaining access to capital	13	67	10	11	+3
e. Working with clients/customers	11	51	29	9	-18
f. Being taken seriously as a business owner	7	54	30	9	-23
d. Managing female employees	4	54	32	10	-28

20. On balance, would you say that the following characteristics - for you personally - are a net positive influence on your business, or a net negative?

Listed in descending order of difference between net positive - net negative

	Net negative (1)	No difference (2)	Net positive (3)	No answer	%Positive - % Negative
f. Your business location	11	21	58	10	+47
e. Your marital status	4	50	31	14	+27
c. Your educational background	19	32	39	11	+20
d. Your ethnic background	1	69	14	16	+13
a. Being a woman	6	65	17	11	+11
b. Your age	18	51	18	13	+0

***Next, please tell us a little bit about your business. If you own more than one business please refer to your primary business when answering these questions.***

21. How many years have you owned this business?

17 Less than 5 years  
40 5 - 9 years  
39 10 or more years  
4 No answer  
8.6 Average

22. How many other businesses have you owned prior to this business?

75 None  
19 One  
6 Two or more

23. How did you acquire ownership of this business? Did you ...

84 Start the business yourself  
3 Purchase an existing business  
7 Inherit the business  
3 Acquire the business without a personal investment (such as through marriage)  
2 No answer

24. What percent of this business do you personally own?

12 Less than 50%  
13 50%  
23 51-99%  
49 100%  
3 No answer

25. (IF LESS THAN 100%:) How many people, in addition to yourself, have ownership of this business? (N=227)
- 54 One additional owner
  - 13 Two additional owners
  - 22 Three or more additional owners
  - 12 No answer
26. (IF LESS THAN 100%:) Are any of the following individuals involved in the ownership and management of this business? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY) (N=227)
- 47 Husband
  - 12 Parent(s)
  - 20 Child/children
  - 27 Other family members
27. How many hours per week do you typically spend managing this business?
- 4 Less than 20 hours
  - 14 20 to 40 hours
  - 20 40 to 49 hours
  - 24 50 to 59 hours
  - 35 60 or more hours
  - 3 No answer
28. In what industry is your primary business?
- 4 Agriculture
  - 3 Natural resource development (oil, gas, coal)
  - 14 Non-durable manufacturing (food, clothing, crafts)
  - 6 Durable manufacturing (machines, steel, tires, other)
  - 40 Wholesale/retail trade
  - 7 Services - travel/tourism
  - 14 Services - business services
  - 2 Services - personal services
  - 2 Technology/ICT
  - 16 Other
29. Do you belong to any of the following business associations? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY)
- 12 Vietnamese Women's Union
  - 12 Young Business People
  - 9 VCCI
  - 9 Sectoral association
  - 13 Other
  - 52 None

30. In what province or region is this business located?

- 11 Hanoi
- 4 Red River Delta region
- 2 North Mountain region
- 5 North Central region
- 12 South Central region
- 4 Central Highland region
- 24 Ho Chi Minh City
- 12 East Southern region
- 23 Mekong Delta region
- 4 No answer

31. Is this business primarily operated out of your home?

- 63 Yes
- 35 No
- 2 No answer

32. How many full-time/contract employees or part-time/seasonal employees does your primary business currently employ, not including yourself?

Number of Employees	Full time, contract	Part time, seasonal
0	13	49
1 - 4	24	14
5 - 9	17	6
10 - 24	21	15
25+	26	16
Average #	67.7	24.9

33. Approximately how many of that total number are women?

62.5% average

34. What were the approximate annual gross sales of your business in 2004? (CHECK ONE)

- 7 Under 100M VND
- 15 100-499M VND
- 11 500-999M VND
- 28 1-4.9B VND
- 13 5-9.9B VND
- 16 10-49.9B VND
- 5 50+B VND
- 4 No answer

**Please answer the following questions about yourself. Responses to these questions will remain confidential, and will be used only in summary with other data.**

35. In which category is your current age?
- 1 Under 25
  - 14 25 to 34
  - 31 35 to 44
  - 38 45 to 54
  - 14 55 or older
  - 2 No answer
36. What is your marital status?
- 80 Married
  - 7 Single, never married
  - 5 Divorced
  - 1 Separated
  - 5 Widowed
  - 2 No answer
37. How many people do you have living at home who are dependent upon the income generated by your business (such as children, parents or other relatives)?
- 5 None
  - 8 One additional person
  - 20 Two additional people
  - 15 Three additional people
  - 17 Four additional people
  - 9 Five additional people
  - 10 Six additional people
  - 10 Seven or more additional people
  - 6 No answer
  - 4.1 Average
38. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- 12 Primary level only
  - 25 Secondary level/Vocational school
  - 27 Some post-secondary
  - 28 University/Institute degree
  - 6 Post graduate work or degree
  - 3 No answer
39. What is your ethnic origin?
- 94 Vietnamese
  - 4 Chinese
  - <1 Khmer
  - <1 Other
  - 2 No answer

**Thank you very much** for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.



## Appendix 3: Qualitative Discussion Guide/Interview Questions for Focus Group Discussions and Interviews

### In-depth Interview Guide for "Voices of Women Entrepreneurs"

#### Background Information:

1. Registered capital
2. Number of employees
3. Revenue
4. Profits (they're usually reluctant to give this info)
5. Growth: changes in the above numbers over the years
6. Experience in running a business: when started this business, whether they have run other businesses before
7. What they have done in the past
8. Education background
9. Family info: marriage status, number of children...

#### General Questions:

1. Why did you start your business?
2. Does your husband or anyone else help you in starting and running the business, in making business decisions?

#### Specific Issues: depending on the business and the woman's experience, the profile might focus on some of the following issues:

1. Access to finance: informal/formal sources? Attitude of bankers or other credit providers, relationship/attitude of credit officers; procedures to get credit;
2. Work-life balance: time management (how to reduce the burden for women?)
3. Networking issues (existing women associations/clubs/are there any informal networks? Do they participate in sectoral business associations? Any barriers for participation in associations?)
4. Business and management skills issues (opportunities for education, training, mentoring...)
5. Law-regulations-policy issues (any discrimination against women? Any privilege needed to support women entrepreneurs?)
6. Social status of women entrepreneurs (negative/positive)
7. Impacts of globalization/WTO



**By stages of the business:**

1. What difficulties did you have starting the business as a woman? How did you overcome them?
2. Difficulties in operating /managing the business?
3. What are your plans for expanding the business and what you think are the main obstacles for realizing your plans?
4. If your current or future market is international, do you have difficulties in finding/dealing/doing business with foreign partners?

**Questions to reveal participants' feelings and attitudes:**

1. What motivates you to be an entrepreneur?
2. If you could choose a different career, would you still choose to do what you're doing?
3. With the experiences you've got today, how differently would you have started and run your business?
4. If you had a daughter, who wants to become an entrepreneur like yourself, what advice would you have for her?
5. Where do you see your business in five years?

## Summary Tables

### Appendix 4: Summary Tables

**Table 1: Important Business Concerns by Major Region**

Business Issue	Total	Region				
		Hanoi	North	Central	HCM City	South
Quality of employees, finding and keeping good employees % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	80% 4.14	96% 4.62	96% 4.48	72% 3.95	80% 4.15	78% 4.09
Learning financial management skills to grow your business % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	69% 3.87	80% 4.00	92% 4.44	65% 3.82	65% 3.69	67% 3.88
Laws and regulations that hamper your business' growth % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	67% 3.85	78% 3.98	59% 3.52	59% 3.72	74% 3.95	64% 3.82
Low efficiency and productivity % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	61% 3.82	56% 3.85	56% 3.61	58% 3.81	68% 3.89	60% 3.77
Access to new markets, such as international trade or selling to new kinds of customers % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	67% 3.81	72% 3.92	74% 4.36	58% 3.57	77% 3.96	65% 3.75
Access to training and technical assistance to learn business management skills % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	62% 3.71	74% 3.92	77% 4.12	60% 3.69	60% 3.61	60% 3.71
Gaining access to technology for your business % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	63% 3.70	80% 4.00	70% 3.96	51% 3.45	60% 3.62	64% 3.77
Access to finance for your business % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	63% 3.62	76% 3.78	85% 4.00	61% 3.62	57% 3.47	61% 3.61
Access to property and land % Very/extremely imp. Average (1-5)*	48% 3.32	54% 3.54	67% 3.70	53% 3.46	36% 3.05	49% 3.32

Table 1: Important Business Concerns by Major Region (cont)						
Business Issue	Total	Region				
		Hanoi	North	Central	HCM City	South
High cost of public services (electricity, water, telephones, etc)						
% Very/extremely imp.	42%	50%	30%	38%	45%	42%
Average (1-5)*	3.22	3.46	2.72	3.21	3.28	3.22
High lost of labor						
% Very/extremely imp.	35%	42%	33%	27%	36%	37%
Average (1-5)*	3.06	3.30	3.22	2.74	3.12	3.07
Competition from other countries						
% Very/extremely imp.	34%	52%	30%	21%	38%	31%
Average (1-5)*	3.22	3.21	2.77	2.50	3.09	2.76
Corruption among government officials						
% Very/extremely imp.	27%	36%	22%	20%	29%	26%
Average (1-5)*	2.55	2.91	2.53	2.32	2.66	2.44
Prejudices against women						
% Very/extremely imp.	27%	30%	22%	19%	26%	30%
Average (1-5)*	2.55	2.79	2.35	2.19	2.54	2.70
Racketeering and business payoffs/bribes						
% Very/extremely imp.	16%	26%	15%	12%	18%	12%
Average (1-5)*	2.26	2.73	2.33	2.05	2.40	2.04
Number of Cases	(473)	(50)	(27)	(99)	(114)	(166)

\* Average on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1=not at all important, 3=somewhat important, and 5=extremely important.

## Summary Tables

**Table 2: Important Business Training/Educational Activities by Employment Size of Firm**

Business Issue	Total	Number of Full-Time Employees				
		None	1 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 24	25+
Training sessions on business management and leadership issues						
% Very/extremely helpful	75%	68%	68%	76%	83%	84%
Average (1-5)*	4.07	4.02	3.81	4.17	4.23	4.14
Training sessions on financial management issues						
% Very/extremely helpful	74%	61%	65%	76%	84%	76%
Average (1-5)*	3.98	3.85	3.75	4.07	4.15	4.04
Learning more about how to access new markets, at home and abroad						
% Very/extremely helpful	71%	63%	56%	73%	75%	84%
Average (1-5)*	3.92	3.94	3.52	3.95	4.05	4.15
Learning more about how to use technology to grow your business						
% Very/extremely helpful	71%	68%	64%	68%	75%	72%
Average (1-5)*	3.91	4.14	3.73	3.89	3.99	3.94
Meeting regularly with other women business owners across the country to share ideas/experiences						
% Very/extremely helpful	64%	70%	68%	60%	66%	56%
Average (1-5)*	3.77	3.90	3.85	3.68	3.82	3.65
Learning more about how to get involved in policy issues and advocacy						
% Very/extremely helpful	60%	64%	58%	66%	56%	62%
Average (1-5)*	3.70	3.84	3.54	3.84	3.68	3.72
Organized trips to other countries to meet with women business owners and their organizations						
% Very/extremely helpful	59%	71%	55%	63%	66%	77%
Average (1-5)*	3.67	3.71	3.28	3.63	3.77	3.92
Number of Cases	(473)	(59)	(111)	(80)	(98)	(125)

\* Average on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1=not at all helpful, 3=somewhat helpful, and 5=extremely helpful.

**Table 3: Types of Financing Used by Age of Business**

Types of Financing Used in Last 12 Months	Total	Number of Years in Business		
		<5	5-9	10+
Business/commercial bank loan	52%	43%	53%	56%
Private sources (personal savings, friends, family)	47	60	44	45
Earnings of the business	23	28	21	26
Personal bank loan	17	29	14	13
Business line of credit	8	8	5	12
Vendor credit	6	9	5	7
Money lender	6	8	6	5
Credit cards	2	0	1	3
Microfinance institution loan	1	4	0	0
Venture capital	0	0	0	0
Other sources	6	4	5	5
Used no financing	20	19	19	24
Number of Cases	(473)	(76)	(190)	(186)

Numbers add up to more than 100% because multiple responses were allowed.

**Table 4: Percent Using Bank Credit by Major Subgroups**

	Currently Have Bank Credit, Such as Loan or Line of Credit?			Number of Cases
	Yes	No	No	Answer
Total	49%	46	5	(473)
<u>Region</u>				
Hanoi	44%	52	4	(50)
North	56%	41	4	(27)
Central	55%	38	7	(99)
HCM City	47%	51	3	(114)
South	48%	47	5	(166)
<u>Major Industry Group</u>				
Goods-producing	59%	35	6	(106)
Services	47%	49	4	(355)
<u>Age of Firm</u>				
< 5 Years	51%	45	4	(76)
5 - 9 Years	47%	50	3	(190)
10+ Years	50%	45	5	(186)

**Table 5: Percent Involved in International Trade by Major Subgroups**

	Currently Exporting/Importing Goods/ Services for Your Business?			Number of Cases
	Yes	No	No Answer	
<b>Total</b>	29%	63	7	(473)
<u>Region</u>				
Hanoi	70%	18	12	(50)
North	14%	82	4	(27)
Central	14%	78	8	(99)
HCM City	66%	40	4	(114)
South	10%	83	7	(166)
<u>Major Industry Group</u>				
Goods-producing	47%	47	6	(106)
Services	24%	69	7	(355)
<u>Years in Business</u>				
< 5	42%	55	3	(76)
5-9	27%	65	8	(190)
10+	29%	65	6	(186)
<u>Number of Full-Time Employees</u>				
0	19%	64	17	(59)
1-4	9%	86	5	(111)
5-9	19%	76	5	(80)
10-24	28%	65	7	(98)
25+	60%	34	6	(125)

**Table 6: Level of Technology Usage by Major Subgroups**

	Percent Using Local Area Network	Percent Using Internet Regularly	Percent With Company Web Site
<b>Total</b>	35%	37%	24%
<u>Region</u>			
Hanoi	82	76	58
North	22	16	4
Central	23	26	16
HCM City	54	66	46
South	21	22	11
<u>Major Industry Group</u>			
Goods-producing	38	45	32
Services	35	38	23
<u>Years in Business</u>			
< 5	43	45	29
5-9	35	35	25
10+	35	43	25
<u>Number of Full-Time Employees</u>			
0	17	16	10
1-4	8	21	8
5-9	25	29	17
10-24	48	47	26
25+	66	65	51
<u>Age of Owner</u>			
Under 45	47	51	33
45 or older	26	29	19

Numbers are percent yes or percent using.

