2001

Social welfare aspects of development in a transition economy: application to Vietnam

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SOCIAL WELFARE ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT IN A TRANSITION ECONOMY: APPLICATION TO VIETNAM

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Dzung The Nguyen

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University of Wollongong, Australia

2001
To Binh Thanh and Thanh Chau
AUTHOR'S CERTIFICATION

I, Dzung The Nguyen, certify that this thesis has not been submitted as a part of the requirements of another degree and that it is the product of my own independent research.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in the thesis.

Signed

[Signature]

11 July 2001
Abstract

Social welfare aspects of development in the transition from a centrally planned system to a market driven economy are of increasing theoretical and practical interest. However, this subject area is characterised by a number of important knowledge gaps concerning both essential concepts of social welfare and methodologies of its exploration, which are magnified by the fundamental changes introduced in the transition process. Specific features due to geography and history add to the complexity.

This thesis represents an attempt at reducing the gaps by developing an innovative conceptual framework and methodological tools for studying social welfare in a developing transition economy and applying them for the empirical analysis of the impact of Vietnam’s transition on its welfare. The main contribution of this thesis is two-fold. In terms of methodological development, it introduces an innovative framework for analysis of social welfare during the transition and develops an intertemporal CGE model with rational expectations and an econometric model for the quantitative analysis of social welfare conditions and the social welfare system, respectively. In terms of empirical work, the thesis has applied qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyse recent changes in Vietnam’s social welfare conditions and social welfare systems.

The analysis has unveiled important insights into recent evolution of Vietnam’s social welfare and its dynamics, which lead to a number of important conclusions. Firstly, it has been established quantitatively that Vietnam’s transition has produced dramatic changes in social welfare in Vietnam. The chosen transition strategy is appropriate for the country’s conditions. However, the transition and welfare policies are not always optimal. Within the chosen transition strategy, the country can obtain greater improvement in living standards by accelerating economic reforms, particularly in the areas of market liberalisation and ownership reform.

There is an urgent need to deepen the reform of the social welfare system, which is still lagging behind reform efforts in other areas and produces limited effects on household welfare. To address the social welfare problems facing Vietnam, such as continuing wide-spread poverty, growing inequality and insecurity, and limited effectiveness of the existing social welfare system, the reform measures should aim at improving targeting of public transfer schemes at the most needy such as the poor, the ethnic minorities, and vulnerable groups and introducing new more selective instruments such as unemployment benefits. Moreover, the analysis confirms the appropriateness of the newly developed methodology for analysis of social welfare under the transition.

Chapter 2 clarifies concepts of social welfare in a transition economy. Having made a clear distinction between social welfare conditions (SWC) and the social welfare system (SWS) – two interlinked aspects of social welfare, the thesis provides a comprehensive review of literature on existing research methodology, studies done on the subject, and identified a number of knowledge gaps to be addressed.

In chapter 3, the thesis introduces an innovative analytical framework, which views the transition as the expansion of people’s choices of their occupation,
consumption, and investment and considers social welfare in terms of opulence, equality, and security. These allow studying the two aspects of social welfare in an integrated and interactive manner.

Based on the analytical framework, this chapter also develops theoretical basis for quantitative analysis of social welfare during the transition through modelling social welfare conditions and the social welfare system in a developing transition economy. The former model distinguishes itself by the combination of neoclassical intertemporal profit and utility optimisation of respective agents with various structuralist features of the developing transition economy, the introduction of HDI-like utility function and rational expectations, and the focus on welfare aspects. The novelty of the former is that it takes into account both public and private transfers as integrated and interacting elements of the social welfare system in a developing transition economy. A theoretical exploration of social welfare aspects of the transition on the models has unveiled that while in general the long-run impact of the transition on social welfare conditions is positive, it may result in short-term production contraction and worsening living standards, depending on the initial conditions and adopted transition policies. Concerning the social welfare system, public transfers may be of impure altruism and crowd out the private transfers. In general, public transfers and the SWS in general have a limited role and cannot replace a rapid and equitable growth in maintaining living standards during the transition.

Next, the study reports a qualitative analysis of changes in social welfare during Vietnam’s transition. Chapter 4 focuses on the impact of the transition on social welfare conditions. The chapter reviews the transition process in Vietnam in comparison with other transition countries. It concludes that in contrast with almost other transition countries, Vietnam’s transition has produced not only remarkable production gains and increasing macroeconomic stability, but also a rapid improvement of living standards. However, as predicted by the theoretical analysis, this is accompanied by growing, although still slightly, inequality and insecurity.

Chapter 5 offers a qualitative analysis of the response of Vietnam’s social welfare system to the increasing need for social protection and assistance during the transition. The analysis points that Vietnam’s social protection system is primarily designed for public employees and focuses on urban areas. The system is characterised by limited number of instruments, restricted coverage, benefits, and efficiency. However, there are innovative efforts to address the need of the most destitute, including working and non-working poor. Other pillars of Vietnam’s social welfare system, such as labour and employment policies, education and health care, are also considered. In general, the effectiveness of the system still limited due to its slow response to the new economic environment, weak targeting, and lack of resources.

Chapter 6 is devoted to a quantitative analysis of social welfare in the transition. The thesis demonstrates how an intertemporal model of SWC with rational expectations and an econometric model of SWS can be built on the basis of the methodological development and applied for practical quantitative analysis of social welfare in a developing country such as Vietnam. The former represents the first intertemporal CGE model of Vietnam’s transition economy. Six policy experiments with different transition and welfare scenarios provide addition insights into welfare dynamics of Vietnam’s transition. In particular, they confirm that different transition policies tend to produce different effects on SWC and long-term impacts can be quite different from short-term ones. Next, the modelling has established quantitatively that
while the transition strategy chosen is relevant and has resulted in a remarkable improvement in SWC, they are not optimal. Fostering the reform process, particularly through accelerating market liberalisation and ownership reform, certainly leads to more impressive achievements. However, the transition policies are interlinked and need to be carried out coherently. Further, as improvement of SWC in the transition economy is positively linked with the development of the non-state sector, the latter is most critical for further enhancement of living standards and poverty reduction. Moreover, SWC is better off from more targeted social policies such as the establishment of unemployment benefits while "populist" policies such as lump-sum public transfers do not produce the effect.

The analysis of the econometric model of the social welfare system also has unveiled a number of important issues facing Vietnam's existing SWS. In support of the qualitative analysis in chapter 5, the quantitative analysis has established that the existing public transfer schemes produce statistically quite insignificant impacts on the welfare of Vietnamese households in general and recipient household in particular. Only poverty reduction assistance – a relatively recently emerging scheme – represents an exception by making statistically significant impacts on household welfare. Next, contrary to social security, social assistance and poverty reduction assistance are impure altruistic and, thus, require recipients' service in return. It has also confirmed that the social protection system is weakly targeted at the most needy, in particular the poor, those affected by disasters, and the vulnerable. Next, private transfers play an essential role in Vietnam's SWS but they are crowded out by public transfers, although slightly. More important, as private transfers deteriorate as a result of covariate risks and irregularities, such as natural disasters, there is a need to strengthen the formal SWS, particularly public transfer schemes. However, Vietnam SWS reform appears still lagging behind reform measures in other areas and this creates an additional constraint to the on-going reform process. The above also represents direction for future reform of Vietnam's SWS and social policies, in general.

The thesis is concluded by chapter 7, which summarises major findings and conclusions of the thesis. Moreover, it discusses existing limitations of the study and suggests future research in this subject.

The thesis utilises existing time series of macroeconomic data and cross-section data accumulated by both national and international agencies as well as the data collected under the two consecutive Government/World Bank/UNDP/SIDA Living Standards Measurement Surveys in 1992-93 and 1997-98. The data sets are complemented by other data collected from the Vietnamese Government's regular household surveys, census and sectoral surveys conducted by line ministries such as labour, education, health, agriculture and rural development, as well as data collected by international organizations such as the World Bank, IMF, UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, ILO and EU and the NGO community in Vietnam.
Acknowledgement

It is my great privilege to express my deep sense of gratitude to my supervising teachers, Professor DP Chaudhri and Professor Rob Castle, to whom no acknowledgement can give full credit for their valuable guidance and unselfish support throughout my doctoral program. I am particularly indebted to Professor Chaudhri for the intellectual inspiration, which he gave me generously through our frequent discussions not only on the thesis’s topics but also on a wide range of issues of contemporary development economics. My special debt is also owned to Professor Castle for his sustained encouragement and tremendous help, particularly by subjecting my works to his thoughtful scrutiny through all stages of this investigation.

I gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by the National Australia Bank and the Department of Economics of the University of Wollongong, without which this study would not have been possible. I am particularly honoured to have been awarded the National Australia Bank’s PhD fellowship.

I am also especially grateful to Ass. Professor Tran Van Hoa for his constructive criticism and invaluable advice on econometric aspects of this study. The friendship and hospitality he kindly extended to me made my stay at the University of Wollongong a great experience.

I also would like to express my appreciation to a number of other individuals who have supported me in various stages of this study and left their imprints in my thinking. Particularly, the intellectual interactions with Professor David Dapice, International Development Institute, Harvard University during our work under the United Nations’ studies on poverty in Vietnam in 1995-96 inspired me to engage in this PhD programme. In the early stage, I also greatly benefited from the involvement of Ass. Professor Charles Harvie, whose extensive knowledge about transition economies and professionalism were extremely helpful for shaping respective parts of this research programme. Professor Peter Dixon and Dr. Ho Van Thiep, Centre of Policy Studies/IMPACT Project at Monash University, were extremely supportive and provided unselfishly valuable insights into intertemporal CGE modelling and the GEMPACK software package. Dr. Paul Chen, Faculty of Economics and Commerce, Australian National University, gave constructive comments on an early draft of various parts concerning the social welfare system.

In various stages of research, I had privilege to work with several outstanding Vietnamese scholars and government officials as well as international consultants in areas related to the thesis’s topic. Among them, I would like to express my particular appreciation to Dr. Nguyen Xuan Nguyen, Deputy Director, Economic Department, VCP’s Central Committee, Dr. Nguyen Hai Huu, Director, Department of Social Protection, Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs, and Dr. Preston, ILO consultant on social security. For this privilege, I am most grateful to UNDP Hanoi, especially my former colleagues, Mr. Edouard Wattez, Resident Representative, and Ms. Minoli de Bresser, Assistant Resident Representative.

I also wish to extend my thankfulness to Ms. Sophie Abercrombie, Administrative Assistant, Department of Economics, University of Wollongong, for her effective administrative support. The research facilities provided by Mr. Wolfgang Brodesser, Professional Officer in Department of Economics, and Merss. Justin Norris, Administrative Assistant, Dean Trifunovich, Computer Systems Officer, and Laszlo
Abel, Desktop Support Officer, in the Faculty of Commerce of the University of Wollongong were excellent and I am extremely grateful for these.

My personal thanks to are due to my Australian old friends, Mrs and Mr. Samaras, for the continual encouragement and thoughtfulness they extended to my family and me.

Last, but not least, I owe a debt of great gratitude to my loving wife and daughter for their understanding, patience and moral support.

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Autumn 12/07/2001
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List of Abbreviations

Bill.  Billions
BSS  Basic social services
CEE(s)  Central and Eastern Europe or Central and Eastern European countries
CEMMA  Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (of Vietnam)
CGE  Computable general equilibrium
CIS(s)  Commonwealth of Independent States
CMEA  Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and Cooperation (also COMECON)
CPV  Communist Party of Vietnam
DCED  Development in communes faced with extreme difficulties
Doi moi  Vietnam’s reform process (English translation: renovation)
EBRD  European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
ESCAP  United Nations Centre for Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific
EU  European Union
FDI  Foreign direct investment
FSU  Former Soviet Union
GDP  Gross domestic product
GEMPACK  General Equilibrium Modelling Package
GNP  Gross National Product
GSO  General Statistical Office (of Vietnam)
GSP  Gross social product
HDI  Human development index
HEPR  Hunger eradication and poverty reduction
HH  Household
HPI  Human poverty index
HRD  Human resources development
ILO  International Labour Organisation
IMF  International Monetary Fund
IMR  Infant mortality rate
ISSA  International Social Security Association
LHS  Left hand side
MARD  Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (of Vietnam)
Mill.  Millions
MO Culture  Ministry of Culture and Communication (of Vietnam)
MOET  Ministry of Education and Training (of Vietnam)
MOH  Ministry of Health (of Vietnam)
MOI  Ministry of Interior (of Vietnam)
MOLISA  Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (of Vietnam)
MPI  Ministry of Planning and Investment (of Vietnam; successor of SPC)
NA  Data not available
NCPF  National Committee for Population and Family Planning (of Vietnam)
NGO(s)  Non-government organisation(s)
NIC(s)  Newly industrialised country (countries)
NMP  National material product
NP(s)  National programme(s) (of Vietnam)
NTP(s)  National target programme(s) (of Vietnam)
OLS  Ordinary Least-Square estimation procedure
PDCED  Programme for socio-economic development in communes faced with extreme difficulties
PPC(s)  Provincial People’s Committee(s) (in Vietnam)
RHS  Right hand side
SA  South Asian countries
SAM(s)  Social accounting matrixes
SBV  State Bank of Vietnam
SEA  Southeast Asian countries
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<td>System of economic and social accounting matrices with extensions</td>
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<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Sweden International Development Agency</td>
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<td>SOE(s)</td>
<td>State-owned enterprises</td>
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<td>SPC</td>
<td>State Planning Committee (of Vietnam)</td>
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<td>SRV</td>
<td>Socialist Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<td>SWC</td>
<td>Social welfare condition</td>
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<td>SWF</td>
<td>Social welfare function</td>
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<td>SWS</td>
<td>Social welfare system</td>
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<td>TB</td>
<td>Tubercles</td>
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<td>UNCED</td>
<td>United Nations Centre for Environment Development</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>United Nations Population Fund</td>
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