

**Speech by Ms Rie Vejs-Kjeldgaard
Director of ILO Country Office for Viet Nam**

**WEDGE National Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Successful Strategies for Women's
Entrepreneurship Development
18 Mar 2011**

Distinguished Representatives from MOLISA, VCCI, VCA, VGCL, Women's Union, Farmers' Union, Youth Union,

Dear Colleagues from UN agencies, INGOs, local NGO,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the International Labour Organization, it is my pleasure to welcome you today at this National Knowledge Sharing Workshop on Successful Strategies for Women's Entrepreneurship Development.

I would like to thank the VCCI, and especially the Vietnam Women's Entrepreneurship Council, for our ongoing collaboration on promoting sustainable entrepreneurship among women and men. We certainly can look back on many important achievements over the past two years, thanks to generous funding by IrishAid, the Government of Ireland's development agency.

The International Labour Organization, since its first days in Vietnam, has been actively involved in fostering enterprise development as a way to promoting Decent Work for all women and men. Much of this work has focused on supporting the establishment and growth of micro and small enterprises for women and men. Our clear and unique mandate has been to combine a market-development approach – supporting the creation of more jobs – with a strong rights-based perspective – not just any jobs but Decent Jobs.

As you all aware, women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to national development: 30% of the incorporated small and medium enterprises are owned by women; about 25% of leaders and CEOs in Vietnamese enterprises in all economic sectors are women, and an estimated 60% of household businesses are owned by women. These are estimated from the Government Statistics Office. But women entrepreneurs continue to face many challenges.

Our current project, WEDGE, has focused on creating training capacity as well as appropriate support services for both men and women who want to start or improve their own business.

But given the timeframe of the project's current phase, which is scheduled to be completed later this year, now seems a good time to review the achievements and to consider where we want to be heading in the future.

The strength of the WEDGE project has been its holistic approach to WED, combining strong work on business development with a rights-based approach. The project's work has ranged from introducing basic business training tools to connecting partner organizations and beneficiaries to all the support services that are needed to enable women to pursue entrepreneurship with success and in a sustainable manner.

We feel that it is now time to follow-up on this work to see what other organisations – both governmental and non-governmental – have done on this subject. How can we make all these experiences useful and accessible for other organizations, so that they and others can extend the positive work that has been done to date?

But promoting WED requires knowledge, skills and tools that are to some extent quite specific. And this is the reason why the ILO in collaboration with VCCI is supporting this workshop to share knowledge on successful strategies. You will hear in more detail about specific tools and strategies that have been developed and promoted through the WEDGE project and also by other development projects.

Today's workshop provides us with a good opportunity to review successful strategies. We hope for a good discussion on how these strategies can be replicated elsewhere in this country and how such support can become institutionalised through national and provincial policies and networks. We also hope that, during this workshop, key actors will learn from each other how they can synergise their efforts and avoid duplication. Our aim is to encourage everyone to move towards a truly multi-disciplinary approach that brings together each side's strengths in the fields of entrepreneurship development and gender equality.

One of the other interesting topics for discussion will be to identify other channels (such as networks and committees) through which we can continue to share knowledge and experiences on WED.

Finally, I believe it is important to acknowledge how far we have come in the promotion of WED. Learning from each other is an essential part of the process of advancement. You will see that much of our workshop is structured around learning from the experiences that each of you brings to this workshop today.

I do believe that what we are going to discuss today will inspire Vietnamese agencies and the development community at large to make sure that women entrepreneurs benefit just as much as men from strategies to reduce poverty through business development.

I would like to thank all of you for your commitment and active participation in this workshop and hope that we will have a fruitful workshop today.

Thank you.