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Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction in Viet Nam

Arsenio M. Balisacan
Ernesto M. Pernia
Gemma Esther B. Estrada

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Arsenio M. Balisacan is Professor of Economics, University of the Philippines; Ernesto M. Pernia is Lead Economist, Economics and Research Department, Asian Development Bank; and Gemma Esther B. Estrada is a consultant, Economics and Research Department, Asian Development Bank. The authors gratefully acknowledge the valuable advice on the data provided by Sarah Bales and comments by Erik Bloom. This paper is forthcoming in the book, Poverty, Growth and Institutions in Developing Asia (Palgrave-MacMillan 2003) edited by Ernesto M. Pernia and Anil B. Deolalikar.

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FOREWORD

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ABSTRACT

Viet Nam's dramatic transition and growth in the 1990s have been attributed to a series of reforms, known as *doi moi*, which began in the late 1980s. Economic growth at nearly 8 percent yearly appeared broad-based, thus benefiting the poor and reducing poverty from 61 percent in 1993 to 37 percent in 1998. Analysis of provincial panel data suggests that the proportionate increases in the incomes of the poorest quintile were appreciably larger than those of the top 20 or 40 percent of the population. This result is at variance with typical findings for other countries, which indicate that welfare gains from growth are smallest for the lowest quintile and rise with income group. The results for Viet Nam suggest that the faster the growth rate, the lesser becomes the role of distributive factors that directly influence the poor's well-being. Still, these factors could contribute to reinforcing both growth and poverty reduction in the long run.

I. INTRODUCTION

Viet Nam's emergence as one of the fastest growing economies in Asia over the last two decades has been widely hailed. This has been attributed to a series of reforms, known as *doi moi*, which started in the latter part of the 1980s. Reforms began primarily in the agricultural sector which, at the time, accounted for close to 40 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and 70 percent of total employment. The country's reform effort focused initially on the dismantling of collective farms, redistribution of land to peasant households through long-term leases, and abolition of price controls on goods and services. It then eliminated production and consumption subsidies and streamlined the public sector (Dollar and Litvack 1998, Weinns 1998). Further, the reform effort included the stabilization of inflation and liberalization of foreign trade and investment (Dollar 2002).

The series of reforms paved the way for the country's spectacular growth in the 1990s. During that decade, GDP growth averaged 7.9 percent a year, remarkably higher than the 5.5 percent growth average for East Asia and Pacific region (excluding People's Republic of China [PRC]) or the 5.6 percent growth for South Asia. The growth of agriculture, averaging 4.8 percent a year, was likewise impressive, exceeding the 3.1 percent average for the East Asia and Pacific region.

Viet Nam's reforms appear to have been broad-based, thus benefiting the poor. During most of the 1990s, the incidence of absolute poverty fell by an average of 4.1 percentage

TABLE 1
POVERTY REDUCTION: VIET NAM VS. OTHER ASIAN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

COUNTRY	PERIOD	PERCENTAGE-POINT REDUCTION PER YEAR	AVERAGE GROWTH OF PER CAPITA GDP (PERCENT)
Viet Nam	1993-98	-4.1	6.8
East Asia and Pacific	1993-98	-2.0	5.6
Bangladesh	1992-96	-1.7	2.8
Cambodia	1994-97	-1.0	2.6
PRC	1993-98	-2.5	10.4
India	1992-97	-1.4	3.8
Philippines	1994-97	-1.3	1.9
Indonesia	1990-96	-2.1	6.4
Thailand	1992-96	-1.0	7.2

Source: ADB estimates.

points a year. In contrast, the average reduction for the East Asia and Pacific region was only 2 percentage points a year (Table 1). Likewise, marked improvement in quality of life was manifested by the relatively high literacy (92.9 percent) and life expectancy (69 years), as well as low mortality (37 per 1,000 live births) in the latter 1990s.

It appears that economic growth has been the key determinant of poverty reduction in Viet Nam, a finding that seems consistent with the results of cross-country regressions (e.g., Dollar and Kraay 2001). Nevertheless, it is important to go beyond cross-country averages to determine the robustness of the conclusions about the growth-poverty relationship. In this paper, we explore the determinants of poverty reduction at the subnational level in Viet Nam during the 1990s using household panel data. In particular, we examine the impact of local economic growth and other factors, including initial endowments and policy conditions, on the welfare of the poor.

II. DATA AND MEASUREMENT ISSUES

The main source of data is the Viet Nam Living Standards Survey (VLSS) conducted in 1992-1993 and 1997-1998 by the Viet Nam General Statistics Office (GSO), with funding from the United Nations Development Program and the Swedish Development International Development Authority. Technical assistance was provided by the World Bank in line with the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) household surveys conducted in a number of developing countries.

The 1992-1993 VLSS covered 4,800 households, while the 1997-1998 VLSS was administered to 6,000 households. The latter survey was designed to update the information on households surveyed in the first VLSS; thus, the two surveys constitute a household panel data set. Out of the total number of households surveyed in 1992-1993 VLSS, about 495 households were not reinterviewed due to a change in sampling weights, transfer of residence or temporary absence from the commune, or some other reasons. About 4,302 households or 90 percent of the original respondents constitute the large panel data set.¹

The surveys were conducted at the household and commune levels. Topics covered at the household level included education, employment, health and fertility, migration, agricultural activities, income and expenditures, and credit and savings. On the other hand, the commune level surveys were administered mainly to rural areas² and comprised questions on demographics, physical and economic infrastructure, education, health, and agriculture. Extensive price data were likewise gathered from both urban and rural areas at the commune level.

In characterizing household welfare, we use household consumption expenditure data. The VLSS contains a rich account of food and nonfood expenditures of households, including amounts spent on holidays, primarily Tet (New Year), which is often characterized by unusually high expenditures on some food items (World Bank 2000). Apart from consumption, income is

¹ Three panel households with insufficient expenditure information are not counted here. For a detailed description of the two surveys, see World Bank (2000, 2001a).

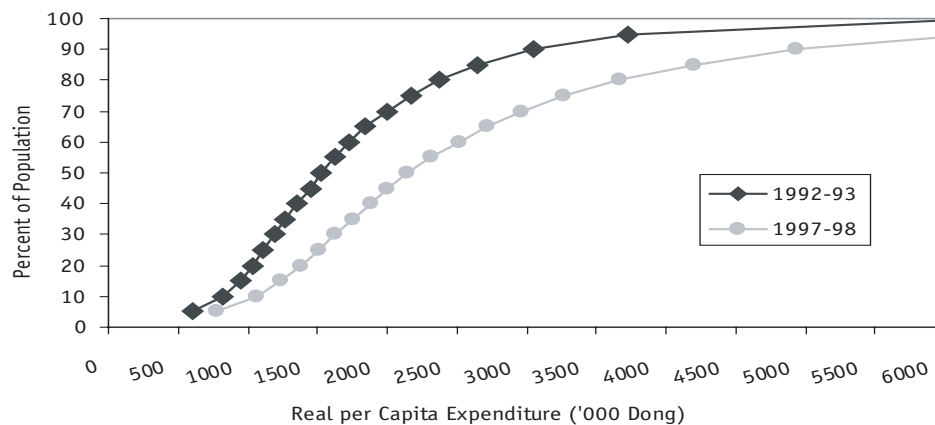
² The 1992-93 VLSS surveyed 120 rural communes, while the 1997-98 VLSS covered 156 communes in rural and minor urban areas.

widely used to measure household welfare. While the VLSS captured household income, the survey in 1997-1998 covered a more extensive account of household income compared to 1992-1993.

On both conceptual and practical grounds, consumption expenditure is preferable to income as a measure of well-being. Households that can borrow or draw from their savings are not constrained by their low current income to maintain a certain standard of living. Indeed, standard arguments in microeconomic theory suggest that welfare level is determined not by current income but by “life-cycle” or “permanent” income. Current consumption is a good approximation of permanent income and, therefore, is an appropriate measure of not only current welfare level but also long-term average well-being. Information on consumption also tends to be less difficult to acquire than income, especially in developing countries where the majority of the poor are self-employed and engaged in agricultural activities with fluctuating incomes (Deaton 2001, Ravallion 2001, Srinivasan 2001).

The chosen indicator of household welfare, consumption expenditure, has to be adjusted for spatial cost-of-living differences and nominal price movements over time. For adjustment in spatial price variation, we employed the cost-of-living indices constructed by the GSO for urban and rural areas in each of the country’s seven regions (see Appendix Table 1). For adjustment in

FIGURE 1
DISTRIBUTION OF LIVING STANDARDS



price changes during the VLSS survey periods, we used the monthly food and nonfood price indices calculated by the GSO (see Appendix Table 2).

The resulting cumulative distribution (CD) curves of per capita expenditures (at January 1998 prices) for the two survey years are shown in Figure 1. Given the national poverty line of 1,789,781 dong (at 1998 prices), the poverty incidence would be roughly 61 percent in 1993 and 37 percent in 1998.³ Note that the two CD curves do not intersect, suggesting that the direction of poverty change is unambiguous, regardless of the assumed (but plausible) poverty norm and even for all other poverty indices that satisfy certain properties of a desirable poverty measure (see, for example, Foster and Shorrocks 1988). Thus, in Figure 1, poverty is unambiguously lower in 1998 than in 1993. The decline in poverty was accompanied by a significant increase in mean per capita expenditure, averaging 8.5 percent a year.⁴

The change in poverty during a given period can be decomposed additively into growth and redistribution components. The growth component pertains to the change in poverty if all consumption groups had shared equally in the growth that occurred. The redistribution component, on the other hand, is defined as the change in poverty if the mean consumption was to remain the same but income distribution had changed as observed during the period. Table 2 summarizes the estimated components of poverty change between 1993 and 1998.⁵ Estimates of changes in both poverty incidence and depth show that growth accounts for the bulk of poverty reduction. If not for the increase, albeit slight, in the Gini ratio from 0.31 to 0.35 during the period, the reduction in poverty incidence would have even been faster, i.e., 27.1 percentage points instead of the observed 23.2 percentage points. Similarly, the reduction in the poverty depth index would have been 13 percentage points instead of the observed 9.5 percentage points. It is worth noting that while the growth process in Viet Nam was accompanied by a mild deterioration in income distribution, its level of inequality during the latter 1990s was still lower than in most developing East Asian countries (Table 3).

TABLE 2
GROWTH AND REDISTRIBUTION COMPONENTS OF POVERTY CHANGE

	INCIDENCE	DEPTH
1993	60.6	19.0
1998	37.4	9.5
Change:	-23.2	-9.5
Due to growth	-27.1	-13.0
Due to redistribution	3.9	3.5

Source: Authors' estimates.

³ The official poverty estimate for 1993 is slightly lower, at 58.2 percent, based on a poverty line of 1,160,363 Vietnamese Dong (at 1993 prices).

⁴ In comparison, real per capita GDP during the same period increased by 7.4 percent a year.

⁵ The components of poverty change have been estimated using the procedure suggested by Kakwani (1997) and Kakwani and Pernia (2000).

TABLE 3
GINI RATIO FOR VIET NAM AND OTHER EAST
ASIAN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

	SURVEY YEAR	GINI RATIO	SURVEY INDICATOR
Viet Nam	1998	0.35	Consumption
Cambodia	1997	0.40	Consumption
PRC	1998	0.40	Income
Indonesia	1999	0.32	Consumption
Malaysia	1997	0.49	Income
Philippines	1997	0.46	Consumption
Thailand	1998	0.41	Consumption

Sources: VLSS (1997-1998) and World Bank (2002).

As shown in Table 2, the period between 1993 and 1998 witnessed a substantial reduction in poverty. An examination of the changes in mean expenditures by decile, using the complete data set for 1992-1993 and 1997-1998 VLSS, however, reveals that the increase in mean expenditure has been the least for the lowest income group (Figure 2). While the increase in the living standards of the poorest decile was close to 30 percent, that for the top decile was about 60 percent (see Bhushan, Bloom, and Thang 2002).

Figure 2 should, however, be interpreted with caution since households belonging to the poorest decile in 1992-1993 may not be the same households in that decile in 1997-1998. Some households may have moved into higher deciles while those in the upper deciles could have moved into lower income groups.⁶ Indeed, the panel data suggest that the poorest group in the 1992-1993 survey had the highest mean expenditure growth, while the richest group had the lowest (Figure 3).

As expected, given geographic differences in initial conditions (including resource endowments and local institutions), changes in the living standards of the poor vary markedly across regions (Figure 4). The highest increase occurred in the Southeast region (140 percent), which also had the lowest initial poverty incidence and accounted for only about 3.5 percent of the poor (Figure 5). This region had comparatively good transport facilities and power infrastructure (Dollar and Glewwe 1998). On the other hand, the lowest increase (about 45 percent) took place in the poorest region, Northern Uplands. This region accounted for 20.6 percent of the poor in 1992-1993 and 28.1 percent in 1997-1998.

⁶ Breaking the panel households into quintiles, Glewwe and Nguyen (2002) find that only 10 percent of those in the poorest quintile in the 1992-93 remained in the same quintile in the 1997-98 VLSS. They contend though that the observed economic mobility may well overestimate the true mobility because of measurement errors.

FIGURE 2
PERCENT CHANGE IN MEAN EXPENDITURES BY DECILE,
COMPLETE DATA SET

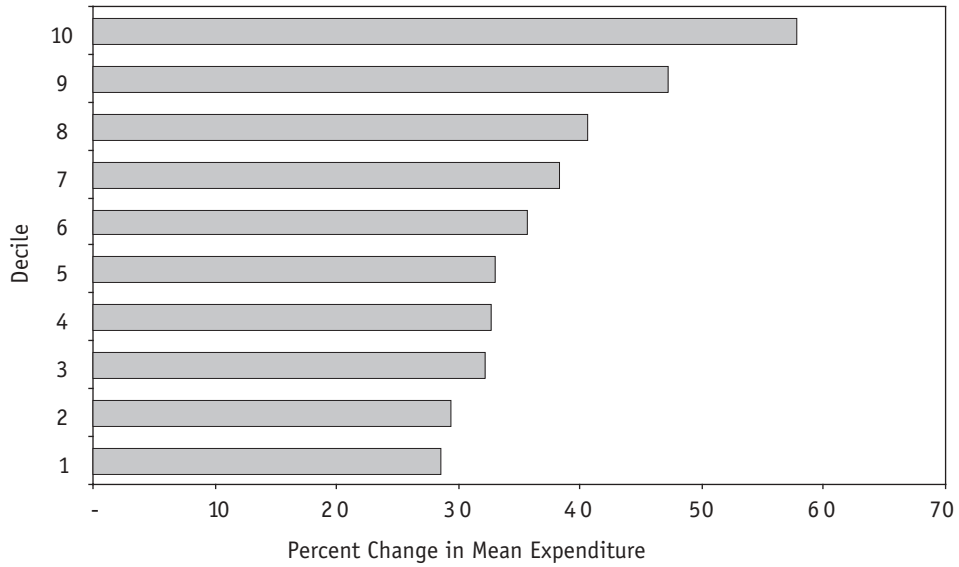


FIGURE 3
PERCENT CHANGE IN MEAN EXPENDITURES BY DECILE,
PANEL DATA

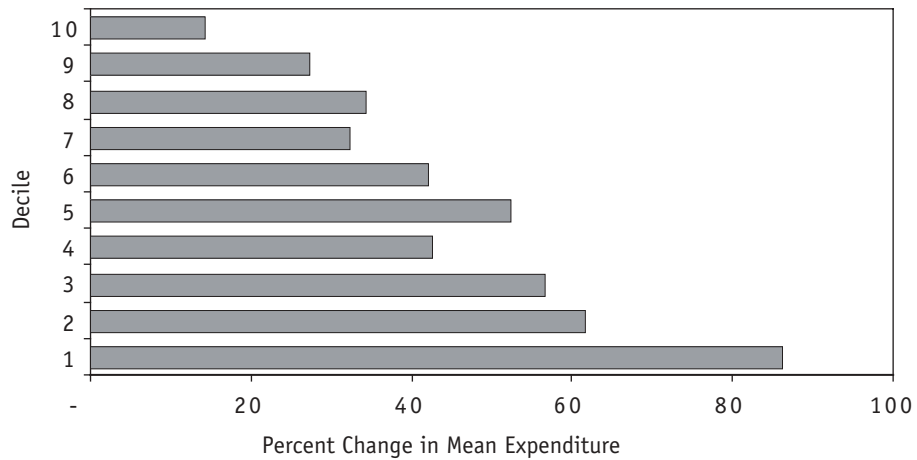


FIGURE 4
PERCENT CHANGE IN MEAN EXPENDITURES OF
THE POOREST QUINTILE, PANEL DATA

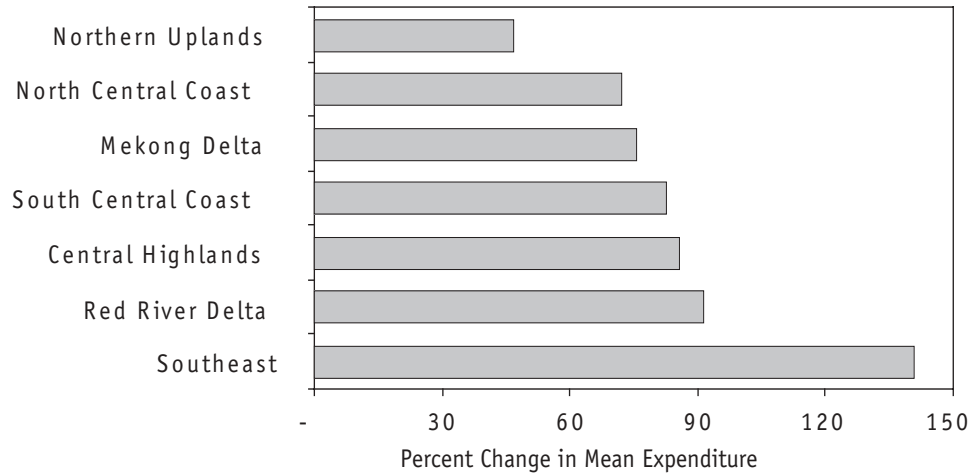
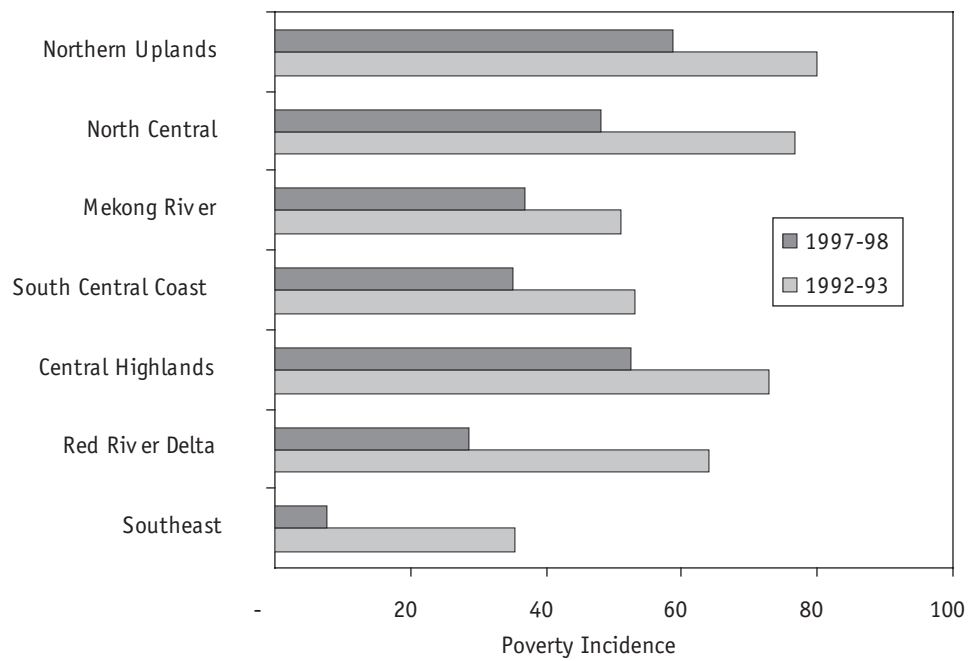


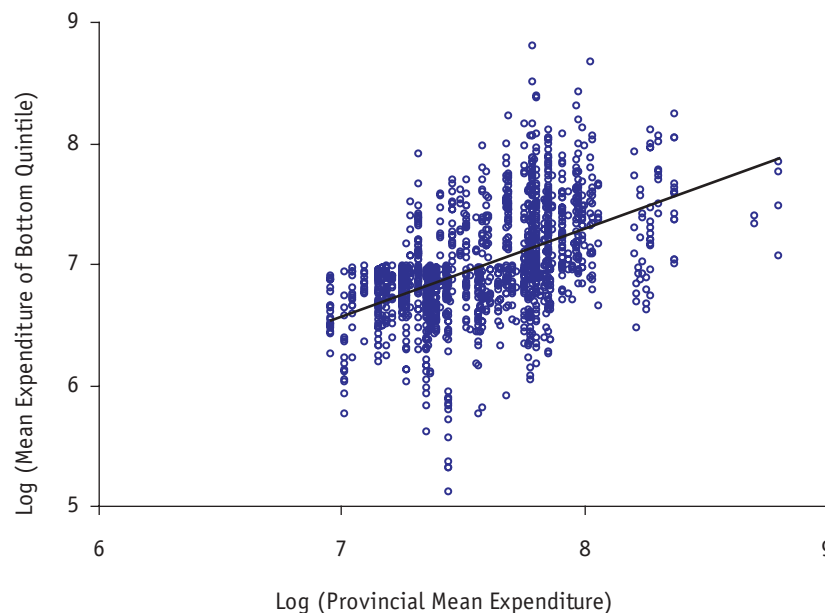
FIGURE 5
POVERTY INCIDENCE BY REGION,
1992-1993 AND 1997-1998



III. DETERMINANTS OF POVERTY REDUCTION

We expect the living standards of the poor to be influenced directly by local economic growth.⁷ Indeed, Figure 6 shows that there is a strong positive relationship between the living standards of the poor and provincial incomes.⁸ This relationship is summarized by the fitted line, obtained by ordinary least squares (OLS) regression of mean living standards or welfare of the poor (as reflected in per capita expenditures) against mean provincial incomes. Since both variables are expressed in logarithms, the slope of the fitted line can be interpreted as the elasticity of the welfare of the poor with respect to overall average income, henceforth referred to as the growth elasticity of poverty. This elasticity is about 0.7, which indicates that a 10 percent increase in overall income is associated with a 7 percent rise in the poor's welfare.

FIGURE 6
AVERAGE EXPENDITURE OF BOTTOM 20 PERCENT VERSUS OVERALL PROVINCIAL MEAN INCOME



However, such OLS regression is likely to result in inconsistent estimates. A main reason is the omission of variables, both observed and unobserved, that have direct impacts on living standards of the poor and are correlated with overall average incomes. Below, we exploit the longitudinal nature of the two surveys and employ panel estimation techniques to obtain consistent estimates of the growth elasticity of poverty and other parameters of interest.

⁷ For the rest of this section, the poor refer to the bottom 20 percent of the population based on the ranking in the 1992-93 VLSS.

⁸ A total of 51 provinces were covered in the 1992-93 VLSS. Newly created provinces in the 1997-98 VLSS were reclassified back to their 1992-93 original definitions.

Specifically, we use the fixed-effects model to control for differences in time-invariant, unobservable household-specific characteristics. This technique removes any bias resulting from the correlation between these characteristics and overall average income or any other explanatory variable. Other explanatory variables included in the model are household demographics, geographic location, schooling, infrastructure, and farm characteristics.

The estimation model has two variants. The first is a regression involving a subsample of 3,494 rural households wherein information on commune characteristic (quality of roads) is available. The second is a regression making use of all households in the panel data set (4,302 households) but excluding the commune-related regressor. In both cases, the observations are unit record data of the poorest 20 percent of the population based on the expenditure distribution in the 1992-1993 survey.

Differences in household welfare may be systematically related with differences in household composition and characteristics (Deaton 1997). The estimation model controls for these effects by including as regressors household size; number of dependents; number of female members at working age; as well as age, gender, and marital status of the household head.

The estimation likewise allows for interaction between overall growth and certain initial conditions. This is to explore whether the impact of growth on the welfare of the poor depends in part on the "environment" in which the poor find themselves in. In India, Ravallion and Datt (2002) find that the growth process was more pro-poor in states with initially higher literacy rates, higher farm productivity, lower landlessness, and lower infant mortality. In this paper, we examine whether the growth elasticity of poverty is higher with more schooling years, presence of electricity, lower incidence of impassable roads, bigger land size, and better irrigation development.

Correspondingly, interaction terms on growth and regional classification are included in the model to account for regional variation in the growth elasticity of poverty. It is expected, for example, that the elasticity is higher for the Red River Delta than for Central Highlands, with the former having remarkably higher initial consumption expenditure, literacy, access to electricity and water, sanitation, and health (see Dollar and Glewwe 1998).

The economic opportunities created by *doi moi* could have strengthened the role of education in raising overall living standards. Moock, Patrinos, and Venkataraman (1998) find that private rates of return to primary and university education in Viet Nam are 13 and 11 percent, respectively. Using cross-sectional data, Glewwe, Gagnolati and Zaman (2000) have shown that an additional year of schooling of household heads raises household consumption per capita by about 3 percent. Their use of panel data indicates that an additional year of general schooling is associated with a 0.6 percentage point increase in consumption expenditures. We attempt to estimate the impact of schooling on living standards of the poor, using years of schooling of household heads as a regressor.

The presence of roads represents access to markets and mobility to explore nonfarm income opportunities. In Viet Nam, about 68.9 percent have access to roads. In terms of road quality, however, only 53.9 percent have access to passable roads more than half of the year. We represent roads in the regression as the number of months in a year that roads are impassable in the commune.

In Viet Nam, a high proportion of the poor (82 percent) live in communities with some electricity. Electricity facilitates commercialization, as well as growth of off-farm employment opportunities. It also allows access to improved technology and enables the use of modern equipment.

About two thirds of population are in the agriculture sector. Land is an important asset that households may use to help smooth consumption during shocks, given imperfections in the credit market.⁹ Limited landholding or landlessness has been strongly associated with poverty in Viet Nam (Weins 1998, World Bank 1999). We represent land size in the regression by type of farmland, namely, annual crop land, perennial land, and water surface land.¹⁰ We also include irrigation, represented here by the proportion of irrigated annual crop land, to account for differences in land quality.

The results of the regression are presented in Table 4 (Appendix Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics on the variables). As expected, local economic growth exerts a strong impact on the welfare of the poor. The estimated coefficient in both models suggest a more than one-to-one correspondence between growth and welfare of the poor, markedly higher than those obtained for Indonesia (Balisacan, Pernia, and Asra 2002) and the Philippines (Balisacan and Pernia 2002), and even higher than that reported by Dollar and Kraay (2001) using cross-country averages. This result strongly indicates that in Viet Nam growth in incomes has been a particularly potent determinant of poverty reduction.

Household composition and characteristics also influence welfare levels. In particular, male-headed household and age of household head are positively associated with the welfare of the poor in both variants of the regression. As expected, household size and number of dependents are negatively associated with household welfare.

Interaction effects between growth and regional classification appear to be insignificant for most regions except for two regions in the South. Controlling for provincial income growth, household demographics and initial conditions, the South Central Coast and Mekong Delta regions are characterized by higher growth elasticity of poverty relative to the reference region.

While schooling does not come out statistically significant in the two variants of the regression for the poorest quintile, it becomes highly significant in the regression for the other quintiles, as discussed in the next section. The interaction effects between growth and other initial conditions (i.e., electricity, roads, and land) also appear to be insignificant. This does not, however, discount the importance of these factors to the welfare of the poor in Viet Nam. As in the cases of Indonesia (Balisacan, Pernia, and Azra 2002) and the Philippines (Balisacan and Pernia 2002), their effects on the poor tend to work via the growth process.

⁹ While land is primarily owned by the state, the issuance of the 1993 Land Law gives households the right to sell or rent out the right to use the land allocated to them by the state for long-term use.

¹⁰ *Annual crop land* refers to the area used by households to cultivate annual cash crops such as rice, corn, and cassava. *Perennial land* is that used for growing long-gestating crops such as coconut, coffee, and tea. *Water surface land* refers to such areas as ponds, lakes or marshes used to raise aquatic products.

TABLE 4
DETERMINANTS OF THE WELFARE OF THE POOR (BOTTOM QUINTILE)

EXPLANATORY VARIABLE	MODEL 1 (RURAL PANEL HOUSEHOLDS)		MODEL 2 (ALL PANEL HOUSEHOLDS)	
	COEFFICIENT	T-RATIO	COEFFICIENT	T-RATIO
Overall mean				
income (Y)	1.3679	7.70***	1.3052	8.63***
Age of household head	0.0236	2.98***	0.0246	3.23***
Age squared	-0.0002	-3.25***	-0.0003	-3.46***
Household size	-0.4070	-5.84***	-0.4612	-7.04***
Number of dependents	-0.0339	-2.33**	-0.0241	-1.80*
Number of female members at working age	-0.0104	-0.48	0.0128	0.66
Male-headed household	0.2092	2.81***	0.1884	2.89***
Marital status of head	0.0392	0.62	0.0802	1.36
<i>Interaction of Y with Region:</i>				
Y*Northern Uplands	0.0993	0.65	0.1675	1.21
Y*Red River Delta	0.0989	0.64	0.1654	1.19
Y*North Central Coast	0.1398	0.89	0.1990	1.36
Y*South Central Coast	0.5163	2.64***	0.6038	3.47***
Y*Central Highlands	0.1702	0.83	0.2494	1.29
Y*Mekong Delta	0.8380	4.19***	0.8231	4.57***
<i>Interaction of Y with "Initial Conditions"</i>				
Y*Schooling	0.0139	0.31	0.0465	1.10
Y*Electricity	0.0903	0.90	0.0965	1.09
Y*Impassable road	-0.0024	-0.19		
Y*Annual crop land	-0.1081	-0.67	-0.1364	-1.00
Y*Perennial land	-0.2647	-3.21***	-0.2462	-3.22***
Y*Water surface land	-0.0859	-0.77	-0.0998	-0.95
Y*Irrigation	-0.1065	-0.91	-0.1547	-1.42
Intercept	-1.6172	-1.35	-1.4934	-1.53
R-sq (within)	0.718		0.712	

*** denotes significance at the 1 percent level.

** denotes significance at the 5 percent level.

* denotes significance at the 10 percent level.

Note: Estimation is by fixed effects regression in which the dependent variable is the logarithm of mean per capita expenditure of the poorest 20 percent. Model 1 refers to the poorest 20 percent of all rural households, while Model 2 (without road variable) pertains to the poorest 20 percent of the complete panel data set.

IV. DIFFERENTIAL EFFECTS ACROSS QUINTILES

Using the same set of variables as that for the bottom quintile based on the panel of rural households (Model 1), we fitted similar regressions for the other four income quintiles. The estimation results for each quintile are summarized in Table 5. For ease of comparison, the result for the first quintile given in Table 4 is reproduced in Table 5.

The regression results show that the growth elasticity is lower for the four upper quintiles than for the first quintile. The growth elasticity drops substantially as one moves from the first to the second quintile. As seen in Appendix Table 3, a similar pattern emerges if we construct quartiles instead of quintiles. The results imply that the impact of growth is highest for the poor, which is the reverse of that found for Indonesia and the Philippines where growth elasticity tends to increase with income level.

Among the household demographic characteristics, those found to be statistically significant in most quintiles are household size and number of household dependents. As expected, both were found to be negatively related to per capita income.

Estimation results also reveal that for the second and fourth quintiles, households in Northern Uplands, Red River Delta, and North Central Coast have lower growth in incomes compared with those in the Southeast. The effect of regional location, however, no longer appears to be important for the third and fifth quintiles, except for the growth–Mekong Delta interaction variable.

While the higher quintiles have lower growth elasticity compared with the first quintile, they respond strongly to interaction effects between growth and initial conditions. In particular, growth is more welfare-enhancing when combined with access to schooling for the second, third, and fourth quintiles, indicating middle-income households benefit significantly from schooling. This finding is particularly relevant in view of the declining school enrollments in rural areas (Glewwe and Jacoby 1998) where measures to encourage investment in education could be critical.

For the third, fourth, and fifth quintiles, growth has a stronger impact on welfare when combined with access to electricity. By its ability to increase productivity levels, electricity (denoting access to technology) can be an effective tool in raising incomes.

The interaction between growth and the number of months that roads are impassable has a negative and significant coefficient for the second, third, and fourth quintiles. This suggests that those in the middle-class households benefit directly from the complementarity between growth and access to good roads. For the poor, other modes of transport may be more important. For example, in the South and in the North where a large proportion of the poor are found, canals and waterways are widely used for transportation (van de Walle 1998).

As with the first quintile, initial land size does not appear to exert a positive direct effect on the welfare of the other four quintiles. Interaction between growth and perennial land size has a significant, albeit negative, coefficient for the first to the third quintiles; at the same time, initial annual crop land size is insignificant. Viet Nam has achieved an equitable distribution of land use rights (Ravallion and van De Walle 2001), but it is land quality that matters rather than land size per se. As observed for the second quintile, irrigation is found to be significant but not annual crop land size.

TABLE 5
DETERMINANTS OF AVERAGE WELFARE BY QUINTILE

EXPLANATORY VARIABLE	Q1 (POOREST)	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5 (RICHEST)
Overall mean income (Y)	1.3679***	0.8081***	0.7609***	0.8702***	0.5548***
Age of household head	0.0236***	-0.0060	0.0057	0.0015	0.0169**
Age squared	-0.0002***	0.0001	0.0000	0.0000	-0.0001*
Household size	-0.4070***	-0.3563***	-0.3308***	-0.2124***	-0.2190***
Number of dependents	-0.0339**	-0.0267*	-0.0102	-0.0821***	-0.0631***
Number of female members at working age	-0.0104	0.0121	0.0501**	-0.0124	-0.0652***
Male-headed household	0.2092***	0.0151	0.0284	0.0544	0.1148*
Marital status of head	0.0392	0.0202	0.1157*	-0.0768	-0.0531
<i>Growth Interaction with Region</i>					
Y*Northern Uplands	0.0993	-0.2432**	-0.1761	-0.3194***	-0.0848
Y*Red River Delta	0.0989	-0.2404**	-0.1713	-0.3113***	-0.0540
Y*North Central Coast	0.1398	-0.2041*	-0.1735	-0.2018*	-0.1659
Y*South Central Coast	0.5163***	0.0952	-0.0264	-0.1200	-0.1093
Y*Central Highlands	0.1702	0.1020	0.2971	-0.4036	0.1841
Y*Mekong Delta	0.8380***	0.4314***	0.3718**	-0.0244	-0.5081***
<i>Growth Interaction with "Initial Conditions"</i>					
Y*Schooling	0.0139	0.1639***	0.0991***	0.1196***	-0.0094
Y*Electricity	0.0903	0.1109	0.1535*	0.1849***	0.2417***
Y*Impassable roads	-0.0024	-0.0251**	-0.0290***	-0.0269***	0.0035
Y*Annual crop land	-0.1081	0.0697	0.0161	-0.1621	-0.0551
Y*Perennial land	-0.2647***	-0.1564**	-0.1295*	-0.0905	0.0013
Y*Water surface land	-0.0859	-0.1031	0.1098	0.0515	-0.0058
Y*Irrigation	-0.1065	0.1875*	0.0005	-0.0742	-0.1748
Intercept	-1.6172	0.4704	1.5290	4.5605***	5.9777
R-sq(within)	0.718	0.646	0.533	0.517	0.276

*** denotes significance at the 1 percent level.

** denotes significance at the 5 percent level.

* denotes significance at the 10 percent level.

Note: Estimation is by fixed effects regression in which the dependent variable is the logarithm of mean per capita expenditure of the poorest 20 percent. Data refer to a panel of 3,494 rural households covering the 1992-93 and 1997-1998 VLSS.

V. CONCLUSION

By international standards, Viet Nam has achieved remarkable poverty reduction and broad-based economic growth appears to be the key. As the provincial panel data suggest, the growth process that occurred had a strong pro-poor bias, i.e., the proportionate increases in the incomes of the poorest 20 percent of the population were appreciably larger than those of the top 20 or 40 percent. The institutional and policy reforms that began in the late 1980s appear to have paved the way for greater participation of the poor in the growth process in Viet Nam than in other Asian developing countries in recent decades. An alternative or additional explanation is that the socialist social infrastructure that remained enabled the poor to benefit from the rapid economic growth.

A caveat is in order. The provincial panel data used in this paper pertain largely to rural areas. As such, the regression results may not fully reflect the broader or nationwide picture. Nevertheless, the concentration of poverty in Viet Nam, as in other developing countries, is in rural areas. Furthermore, policy and institutional reforms were under way prior to the period covered by the provincial panel survey, but the reforms had to be well in place before they could exert a significant impact on both economic growth and poverty reduction.

Finally, the findings for Viet Nam relative to those for the other countries suggest that the higher the growth rate, the lesser becomes the role of distributive factors that directly influence the poor's well-being. Still, these factors could contribute to reinforcing both growth and poverty reduction in the long run.

APPENDIX TABLE 1
REGIONAL PRICE INDICES FOR VLSS 1992-1993 AND 1997-1998

REGIONS	1992-1993		1997-1998	
	URBAN	RURAL	URBAN	RURAL
Northern Uplands	1.113	0.968	0.993	1.018
Red River Delta	1.072	0.934	1.056	0.816
North Central	1.019	0.912	1.025	0.938
Central Coast	1.066	0.953	1.053	0.974
Central Highlands	-	1.086	-	1.060
Southeast	1.223	1.049	1.134	0.965
Mekong Delta	1.107	0.100	1.013	1.027

Note: No price index was used for urban areas in the Central Highlands since there were no respondents coming from the urban areas of this region in both survey years.

Source: Government Statistics Office.

APPENDIX TABLE 2
MONTHLY PRICE INDICES FOR VLSS 1992-1993 AND 1997-1998

	1992-1993		1997-1998		
	FOOD & FOODSTUFF	NON-FOOD	FOOD & FOODSTUFF	NON-FOOD	
October 92	0.577	0.773	December 97	0.979	0.992
November 92	0.573	0.789	January 98	1.000	1.000
December 92	0.584	0.807	February 98	1.030	1.009
January 93	0.595	0.817	March 98	1.022	0.998
February 93	0.624	0.812	April 98	1.046	1.001
March 93	0.621	0.805	May 98	1.068	1.004
April 93	0.631	0.799	June 98	1.067	1.005
May 93	0.627	0.807	July 98	1.059	1.006
June 93	0.627	0.802	August 98	1.074	1.011
July 93	0.630	0.798	September 98	1.085	1.017
August 93	0.627	0.799	October 98	1.089	1.019
September 93	0.577	0.799	November 98	1.086	1.027

Source: Government Statistics Office.

APPENDIX TABLE 3
DETERMINANTS OF AVERAGE WELFARE BY QUARTILE

EXPLANATORY VARIABLE	Q1 (POOREST)	Q2	Q3	Q4 (RICHEST)
Overall mean income (Y)	1.2660***	0.7476***	1.0032***	0.5207***
Age of household head	0.0251***	-0.0054	0.0002	0.0176**
Age squared	-0.0003***	0.0001	0.0000	-0.0002**
Household size	-0.4006***	-0.2964***	-0.3218***	-0.1903***
Number of dependents	-0.0320	-0.0160	-0.0476***	-0.0717***
Number of female members at working age	-0.0098	0.0432**	0.0158	-0.0671***
Male-headed household	0.1918***	-0.0298	0.0760	0.0902*
Marital status of head	0.0103	0.0810	-0.0159	-0.0281
<i>Interaction with Regions:</i>				
Y*Northern Uplands	0.0420	-0.2722***	-0.2820***	-0.0570
Y*Red River Delta	0.0402	-0.2675***	-0.2700***	-0.0308
Y*North Central Coast	0.0762	-0.1777	-0.2297**	-0.1125
Y*South Central Coast	0.5209***	-0.1017	-0.0960	-0.0715
Y*Central Highlands	0.1722	0.1303	-0.0660	-0.2067
Y*Mekong Delta	0.6885***	0.5174***	0.1709	-0.4446***
<i>Interaction with "Initial Conditions"</i>				
Y*Schooling	0.0156	0.1294***	0.0984***	0.0005
Y*Electricity	0.0879	0.1944***	0.0524	0.2893***
Y*Impassable roads	-0.0054	-0.0313***	-0.0347***	0.0020
Y*Annual crop land	-0.0555	0.1636	-0.1690	-0.0826
Y*Perennial land	-0.2494***	-0.1605***	-0.1670***	0.0372
Y*Water surface land	-0.1194	0.0141	0.1202	0.0255
Y*Irrigation	-0.0279	0.0816	-0.0241	-0.1770*
Intercept	-1.4067	-0.1956	4.1068***	5.7180***
R-sq (within)	0.710	0.597	0.521	0.302

*** denotes significance at the 1 percent level.

** denotes significance at the 5 percent level.

* denotes significance at the 10 percent level.

Note: Estimation is by fixed effects regression in which the dependent variable is the logarithm of mean per capita expenditure of the poorest 20 percent. Data refer to a panel of 3,494 rural households covering the 1992-93 and 1997-1998 VLSS.

APPENDIX TABLE 4
SUMMARY OF VARIABLES

VARIABLE	MEAN	STD DEV	MIN	MAX
Income of the poor: <i>ln(Ave. per capita expenditure of bottom 20 percent)</i>	7.4877	0.5064	5.1232	10.1018
Overall mean income: <i>ln(Ave. per capita expenditure of the province)</i>	7.6195	0.3171	6.8269	8.7164
Age: <i>Age of household head</i>	46.4837	14.3599	16.0000	95.0000
Age squared	2366.9120	1444.3720	256.0000	9025.0000
Household size	1.4986	0.4718	0.0000	3.2189
Number of dependents: <i>household members at ages less than 15 years old and above 65 years old</i>	2.0947	1.4904	0.0000	13.0000
Number of female members at working age: <i>with ages 15 to 65</i>	1.4870	0.8867	0.0000	7.0000
Male-headed household	0.7728	0.4191	0.0000	1.0000
Marital status of head	0.8173	0.3865	0.0000	1.0000
Overall Income *Northern Uplands	1.2833	2.8019	0.0000	7.8633
Overall Income *Red River Delta	1.8435	3.2673	0.0000	8.5892
Overall Income *North Central Coast	1.1786	2.7285	0.0000	7.8406
Overall Income *South Central Coast	0.8238	2.3805	0.0000	8.0489
Overall Income *Central Highlands	0.2454	1.3317	0.0000	7.7494
Overall Income *Mekong Delta	1.5641	3.1067	0.0000	8.0159
Overall income* years of schooling of household head	10.4022	9.1788	0.0000	103.0706
Overall income* access to electricity	2.9359	3.7306	0.0000	8.7164
Overall income* no. of months roads are impassable	16.3603	32.6064	0.0000	99.9686
Overall income* annual crop land	13.7613	5.2197	0.0000	19.3473
Overall income* perennial land	7.3101	6.9042	0.0000	19.1096
Overall income* water surface land	2.8998	5.3203	0.0000	18.5727
Overall income* proportion of irrigated land	4.7668	3.3895	0.0000	8.7164

Note: Household size and land variables are also expressed in logarithms.

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