

## ABOUT UN WOMEN

*UN Women is the UN organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, UN Women was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.*

*UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to implement these standards. It stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on five priority areas: increasing women's leadership and participation; ending violence against women; engaging women in all aspects of peace and security processes; enhancing women's economic empowerment; and making gender equality central to national development planning and budgeting. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.*

## SITUATION OF WOMEN – OVERVIEW

China's economic growth has turned it into the second largest economy in the world. The absolute poverty rate has improved—from 65.2% to 10.4% between 1981 and 2004—and China is on track to meet its MDG targets, with improvements in literacy, health and access to water and sanitation sources for rural communities. Important strides have also been made in terms of gender equality. In urban areas, increasing numbers of women pursuing higher education, are in waged employment, or have started small businesses. Women and men are equal before the law and women's rights are strengthened in legislation, including within marriage, after legal reform starting in the 1950s where abolished the traditional 'foot-binding' practice, banned concubines and bride sales, and legalized divorce.

**Legal Frameworks for Gender Equality** — The empowerment of women is on the broader policy and legislative agenda. The Government's 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, its chief national development strategy, calls for the "overall development of women" as an objective. The All China Women's Federation (ACWF), responsible for the implementation of gender policies, is carrying out its national gender equality action plan, *the Program for Chinese Women's Development (2011-2020)*.

China's transformation has not come without serious costs, including socio-economic inequalities, environmental degradation, and the spread of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

**Socio-economic inequalities** – The economic disparity between rural and urban China is one of the largest in the world, with social discontent manifesting in farmer uprisings and worker protests. China has a sizeable poor population (second only to India), made up of people in the rural, mountainous regions, and millions of rural migrants to urban areas. Women farmers are vulnerable to poverty. As more rural men than women migrate for work, women are left behind as heads of households who bear the household burden and generate income. Socio-economic imbalances are compounded by a highly skewed male to female ratio due to Chinese society's preference for male offspring, and the practice of sex-selective abortion and female infanticide. In 2005, the sex ratio of children under the age of 5 totaled 122 boys for every 100 girls born, the highest ratio in all of Asia Pacific.

Almost 70% of women are in paid employment and discrimination against women persists in the labour market. Women are concentrated in service-sector jobs, or work in rural areas for low pay. More women than men are laid off and far fewer reemployed. The retirement age for women is five years earlier than for men, resulting in their receiving smaller pensions and lower salaries.

**Governance and decision-making** – China remains a patriarchal society, a key reason for the lower participation of women in decision-making processes. Parliamentary participation has remained 22% since the late 1970s, and although the number of women working in public administration has increased, they are concentrated in lower-level jobs. In rural China, although women make up 65% of the rural labor force, they occupy only 1-2 % of local decision-making positions.

**Violence against women** – An ACWF survey in 2011 reported that domestic violence occurred in 24.7% of households. There are efforts to increase support services, such as shelters, legal aid and medical services but these meet only a small fraction of the demand. Trafficking is on the rise both cross-border and within-country for prostitution and marriage, exacerbated by the skewed birth sex-ratio.

**HIV/AIDS** – China is experiencing a feminization of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The female to male ratio of infection has increased from 1:9 in 1995 to 1:2.6 in 2006. Increases are in mother-to-child transmission and in heterosexual transmission, predominantly through intimate partner transmission, which is linked to domestic violence and women’s resulting inability to negotiate safe sex.

**Climate change** – Although both women and men are affected by climate change and environmental degradation, existing inequalities, limited access to resources, restricted rights, and the lack of women’s voices in decision-making increases women’s vulnerability. Poor women are especially exposed because of their dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods. Furthermore, during natural disasters they face discrimination in accessing shelter and medical care, and are more susceptible to disease because of their traditional role in caring for the sick.

## UN WOMEN IN CHINA

Since 1998 UN Women has worked to support the government, the civil society, and development partners to empower women and advance gender equality. A core focus of programmes has been to increase women’s participation in all aspects of life. Efforts have included:

### **Strengthening women’s economic security by expanding opportunities, eliminating gender disparities in employment and reinforcing women’s right to property and inheritance under China Gender Facility programme**

UN Women has worked with the Gerontology Centre of Tsinghua University to establish gender-responsive social security for the elderly, especially for widows; with the China Employment Promotion Association to engender the 2008 China Employment Promotion Law ensuring equal employment for men and women; with the Beijing Legal Aid Center to develop a standard labour contract for all the domestic workers in Beijing to protect their rights; and with the Yangzhou Party School to ensure female migrant workers are included in the social security system in Yangzhou, Jiangsu Province; and with the Guangdong Women’s Development Center which conducted research on the gender gaps in employment; with ACWF, UN Women advocate policy and legislation on protection of domestic workers’ rights.

### **Supporting gender-responsive governance by promoting women’s participation in decision-making**

– UN Women has focused on technical assistance and capacity-building for legislators and government staff on gender mainstreaming and implementing CEDAW. UN Women worked within the Party school system – to hold training sessions on gender equality for government officials at the Kunming Municipal Party School in Yunnan province and the Central Party School in Beijing. UN Women worked with

Huazhong Normal University to apply innovative voting rules tailored to each village’s needs. As a result, the overall representation of women was increased by 16%. Now 86% of village committees in Guangshui, Hubei Province (351 villages) have female representatives. UN Women supports ACWF Equal Political Participation for Chinese Women Programme.

### **Addressing the gender dimensions of climate change and natural disasters**

– UN Women supports the development of women’s capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change, and to recover from environmental disasters. More than 1,000 women in the earthquake-hit southwest provinces received assistance and skills-training from a revolving fund to set up small enterprises to regain their livelihoods. With support from AusAID, UN women works with the China Irrigation and Drainage Development Center in Qingtongxia County, Ningxia Province, to empower women in their participation in water and irrigation management in their communities. In addition, UN Women has worked with Sichuan Party School to conduct research on gender and disaster and shared the findings with the provincial government. UN Women supports Lanzhou University and Jiangxi Provincial Climate Change Center on climate change impact research around Poyang Lake area and with the Zhuhai Biology Society on incorporating gender into their wild animal protection programme.

### **Tackling gender-based violence and mitigating the effects of HIV/AIDS on women**

– UN Women works to support national partners to develop legislation and action plans around domestic violence prevention; to building gender-responsive knowledge and capacity among policy-makers and service providers on violence against women. One important result of addressing the shortage of services for survivors is the domestic violence shelter in Xuzhou, in partnership with the Ministry of Civil Affairs and the Xuzhou Women’s Federation. UN Women supports the Inner Mongolia Women’s Federation and Xinjiang Women’s Federation to develop local Regulation on Prevention of Violence Against Women; and worked with Hunan Provincial Women’s Federation and Hunan Supreme Court on Judicial Guidelines. UN Women works with Hunan Women’s Federation, Hunan Public Security Bureau, and Hunan Provincial Police School on Police Guidelines on handling domestic cases in Hunan. On HIV/AIDS, UN Women is supporting research on the gender dimensions of the epidemic in China, as well as training for national institutions on creating gender-sensitive strategies to remove stigma and discrimination of women living with HIV/AIDS, and improve service-delivery.