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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by YouChange China Social Entrepreneur Foundation, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 February 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



Women’s Right to Development: Knowledge and Practice from Civil Society in China

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The human right to development is a multi-dimensional concept that involves various social issues and actors. YouChange China Social Entrepreneur Foundation (hereafter YouChange Foundation) recognises that women in rural China are especially in need of capacity building and empowerment.

Rural Women in Need

Currently, 250 million working-aged women are living in rural China. It is not uncommon to see these women bear the double burden of agricultural activity and household duty. As a result, they often lack the knowledge, resources, and confidence to pursue a career outside the household and farm field, thus a meaningful and fulfilled life.

Women Empowerment via E-commerce

The opportunity to improve rural women’s lives emerged as the development of Internet Communication Technology (ICT) prompted the boom of e-commerce in China. Since 2015, YouChange’s “Women Up!” e-commerce training programme has been helping rural women to start their own businesses. The programme identifies three dimensions of women’s needs and responds to them:

- First, the programme provides courses in financial management, marketing, and online platform operation taught by professional volunteers to equip rural women with the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Second, each participant is assigned a grant to purchase materials, equipment, and open an online store.
- Third, female leadership, family relation, and mental health courses are also given to enhance their inner strength.

With mobile internet service covering most rural China, more training can be delivered to a broader range of beneficiaries at a much lower cost. From 2015 to 2021, over 16,000 rural women have completed the “Women Up!” training, and 65% of whom have successfully started their businesses and earned income increase from USD100 to USD450.

In addition, the programme has brought significant improvement in women’s psychological condition and social relations. According to third-party evaluation, around 70% of participants feel they gain a better sense of female leadership. During in-depth interviews, many participants say they can handle communication and emotions (their own and others’) better after the training; children consider them role models, and marriages become more harmonious.

The inspiring result is not the sole effort of YouChange Foundation. Instead of giving and aiding, we consider our work to discover and to connect.

- On the one hand, there are incredible organic products, traditional handicrafts and indigenous aesthetic designs in China’s rural areas waiting to be shown to the mainstream market. The programme is only successful because rural areas have unlimited potential to thrive.
- On the other hand, a collective impact is consolidated by the central and regional governments, multi-national corporations (as donors), local training partners, and women participants themselves to construct an ecosystem that allows the programme to operate with abundant resources and smooth implementation.

Shuzhen Yang: Remarkable Woman Becomes Village Leader

We would like to present the case of Shuzhen Yang, a woman who changed her own life and entire village by becoming a proud entrepreneur and village leader. Like many women in her village, Shuzhen left for opportunities in the city following her husband, only to return when they couldn't afford the living expenses in urban area anymore. Desperate to find the meaning of her life and earn enough money for her two children to attend school, she came up with the idea of selling self-made embroidery. Starting a business turned out to be much more challenging than Shuzhen initially imagined. Barely earning any money, she was frequently faulted by her family and taunted by the village. Even her eldest son started to blame her for always being busy, and his school performance was falling behind.

When "Women Up!" programme launched in Shuzhen's county, she was one of the first to join. During the training, she has learned how to run an online store and social media channel. But it was in the course "Female Leadership" where she started to explore the power within herself. When she gave her first public speech at a group session, looking down at women like herself, with hope in their eyes, she realised that they could achieve great things together.

After finishing the training, she talked several other women into joining her workshop and established a specialised cooperative. Shuzhen posts beautifully filmed videos of their exquisite embroidery on their social media channel, attracting many customers from thousands of miles away. To encourage more women to join her, Shuzhen decided to run for the deputy secretary of the village committee. It was no surprise that she was elected almost unanimously since she has brought higher income to many households in the village. However, what made Shuzhen most proud is that after seeing her working so hard for the family, Shuzhen's son forgave her and began to try harder at school.

Women's Right to Development: Multi-dimensional Task Requiring Joint Efforts

When a woman is given the choice and ability to control her own life, there is truly no limit to what she can achieve. YouChange Foundation firmly believes that the development of human is the greatest development of all. We would like to contribute to the knowledge and practice of the right to development by stressing the following points:

First, more attention should be given to promoting women's right to development, which will further facilitate other aspects of sustainable development. For example, more family resources will be allocated to maternal care and education when women contribute more to family income, which will lead to lower infant mortality and higher school attendance.

Second, the right to development consists of multiple dimensions. In our case, three levels of women's needs are identified during programme design: the right to higher income, the right to social status, public expression and respect, and the right to long-term emotional and mental care. Only when those needs of the targeted group are met can the programme bring overall development to the people and the region.

Third, promoting the right to development is a long-term undertaking requiring a considerable amount of investments. Instead of making individual efforts, various actors who share the same vision should join forces and establish collective impact. The participation of civil society is crucial since it can act as the bridge between private and public sectors.

The initiation of China's rural revitalisation strategy is an opportunity and responsibility for us to make our impact. By influencing policymaking and developmental practice, we can direct more resources and attention to people's rights to development, especially for rural women like Shuzhen. Together, we can bring hope and strength to those who are stuck in predicaments but still fighting for a better tomorrow.