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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.

[22 August 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



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

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

Rural Women in Need

Currently, 250 million working-age 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 online stores.
- 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 2020, over 16,000 rural women have completed "Women Up!" training, 70% of whom have successfully started their businesses and earned income increase by \$450.

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 other's) better after the training; children consider them role models, and marriage becomes more harmonious overall.

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

- On the one hand, there are incredible organic products, traditional handicrafts and indigenous aesthetic designs in China's countryside waiting to be shown to the mainstream market. The programme is only successful because rurality itself has 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 leader of the village. Like many women in her village, Shuzhen left for city jobs following her husband, only to return when they couldn't afford urban life 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 older son started to blame her for always being busy, and his grade was declining.

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. But it was in the course “Female Leadership”, she started to explore the power inside her. When she gave her first public speech at a group session, looking down at women like herself, eager to glow, 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 wealthier areas. 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 his mother 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 decide her life, there is truly no limit to what she can achieve. YouChange Foundation firmly believes that the development of people is the greatest development of all. We would like to contribute to the discourse 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, maternal care and children's education will receive more family investments, 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 the various 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 considerable resource input. 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 binding agent 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 right 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.