



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

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Agenda item 3

**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.

[6 February 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## **Intangible Cultural Heritage As The Entry Point For Gender and Economic Development - Example From YouChange China Social Entrepreneur Foundation's Practice In Rural China**

In the practice of rural development, vitality often comes from diversity. History has shown us that simply copying western modernisation may cause repression, exclusion, and inequality. It has been long established that respect for indigenous cultures is the precondition of successful developmental intervention, and now YouChange China Social Entrepreneur Foundation is exploring a new territory: How to make indigenous cultures the driving force of rural development?

To help realise the potential of intangible cultural heritage in Chinese rural areas, the YouChange China Social Entrepreneur Foundation and the Beijing Starbucks Foundation together initiated the “Star-show Future” programme. “Star-show Future” targets rural female inheritors of intangible cultural heritage, and trains and empowers them in aesthetic design, marketing, financial management, social media operation, female leadership and so on.

“Star-show Future” specifically targets women in rural areas. It is estimated that there are 250 million women living in China’s rural areas, who often bear the double burden of agricultural production and housework duty. Entering the cultural and creative industry can effectively increase the income of these women and help them pursue their life goals.

In 2022, “Star-show Future” recruited 50 female inheritors and organized its first off-online training convention in August. These women are from 7 Chinese provinces, including Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan, and represent over 30 Chinese-origin intangible cultural heritages such as Miao Embroidery, Bamboo Weaving, and Tie-dye. During the 10-day training, they participated in female leadership sessions, lectures on aesthetic design given by experts from universities and museums, as well as online marketing courses given by pro bono workers from the industry.

In the next 3 years, “Star-show Future” plans to empower 1,250 female inheritors and specifically cultivate 50 of them as industry leaders. The programme will also incubate 15 rural cooperatives which will develop and produce over 90 different kinds of intangible cultural heritage products and 3 brands and achieve a 15% income increase for programme participants.

Preserving intangible cultural heritage and advancing economic development don’t always go hand in hand, but luckily “Star-show Future” has gathered a group of great women who are determined to achieve both despite all the obstacles. Shuixian Song is the national inheritor of Guizhou’s Horsetail Embroidery. This particular form of embroidery art uses hard horsetail hair which makes it resistant to time and gained its name of the living fossil of embroidery. Horsetail Embroidery pieces are passed from generation to generation with blessings from family ancestors. In Shuixian’s early years, he witnessed how countless pieces of antique Horsetail Embroidery were sold at very low prices and never appreciated. Ever since then, Shuixian started to collect Horsetail Embroidery with his own saving. He also transformed his house into a small museum.

A few years later, he met Yanting who was a college student making a documentary about Horsetail Embroidery and eventually became his daughter-in-law. The family started their own company and set up research and design teams to develop embroidery pieces that combine modern aesthetics and meet the taste of the younger generation.

Still, they needed guidance to bring their products into bigger markets. In 2022, Yanting signed up for the “Star-show Future” programme. In the programme, she was able to express her concerns and get advice from experts and fellow female entrepreneurs. Their company has been growing steadily and provided employment for over 300 villagers.

The economic potential and positive social impact of promoting intangible heritage to the wider society is not unrecognised before but recently revitalised by the development of cross

broader e-commerce and China's efforts in rural revitalisation. A few points can be drawn from Youchange's practice and Shuixian's story:

First, behind every piece of intangible cultural heritage are generations of tradition, intelligence, and efforts of human beings, which all by themselves are invaluable. YouChange China Social Entrepreneur Foundation believes that the greatest development is the development of human beings. The focal point of our efforts should always be the actual needs of the beneficiaries.

Second, the old "fish or fishing" metaphor still has its value in today's developmental practice. On the one hand, outside resources in terms of finance, knowledge, and technology are undeniably important for the kick-start of local development; on the other hand, the implication from the endogenous growth theory is that sustainable and healthy development of rural areas should be based on indigenous human and cultural resources. Intangible cultural heritage is a good entry point for many least developed and developing countries since they have rich histories and unique cultures waiting to be discovered.

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

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