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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 China Society for Human Rights Studies (CSHRS), 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.

[23 August 2023]

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



Empowering Women: Advancing Rights and Dignity through Development

Development plays a vital role in making human rights a reality and empowering women to fully embrace their rights and dignity on an equal footing. Development, however, transcends mere economic growth. It also involves implementing the right policies, safeguarding rights, and adopting governance models that align with practical needs to ensure genuine progress.

“Feminization of poverty” has been an issue of worldwide concern since Diana Pearce introduced the term and has gained notable recognition in both theoretical discourse and practical application. Several elements contribute to this problem, such as inadequate healthcare, restricted access to education, low employment opportunities, lack of family and societal support, and the burden of extensive household chores. In 1995, the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women put forth the Platform for Action, which identified “Women and Poverty” as the first one of the twelve critical areas of concern. The Platform emphasized the disturbing reality that over one billion people across the globe live in poverty. Among them, the majority are women, a disparity that is especially pronounced in developing countries.

China has consistently taken gender into account in its poverty alleviation and development strategies. The “Priority Poverty Alleviation Program (1994-2000),” which was in effect since 1994, incorporates policies and measures that actively involve women in poverty reduction. These initiatives are aligned with women’s needs and circumstances, encompassing arrangements for hands-on skill training and facilitating increased participation of women in the workforce. In the past, some women in rural China face constraints due to traditional gender roles and a slower rural economy. This limits their access to opportunities in the larger market. But recent poverty alleviation and rural revitalization efforts in China have created new possibilities. Women can now engage in local jobs without leaving their families, achieving a balance between work and family. As the once marginalized women step out of their homes and join factories, cooperatives, and village communities, they form new social connections and a sense of belonging. This process helps them develop a stronger understanding of themselves and break away from society’s narrow view of impoverished women. Poverty alleviation helps more than 40,000,000 women to escape poverty and rural revitalization not only enables them to find employment, but also empowers them to become effective leaders. By some estimates, China now boasts over 300,000 family farms and agricultural cooperatives led by women. Moreover, more women are becoming aware of and are participating in political activities. However, the efforts to alleviate poverty and revitalize rural areas are bringing together various resources and advantages, with a strong focus on ensuring the rights of participation for all, including the impoverished. This has greatly motivated and empowered women in rural regions to participate in decision-making about rural affairs.

During our research, we discovered that trust and collaboration between the public and government play a crucial role in advancing human rights through development. Over twenty years ago, an innovative business project emerged on Jinyun Mountain in Chongqing. It fused rural tourism with leisure agriculture to create “farmstay.” Many women from local villages became managers or owners of such business, enjoying both busy lives and substantial profits. As time went on, however, the sector encountered an obstacle. What began as a prosperous era led to unfettered growth, excessive similarity between offerings, and, in some cases, unauthorized building to increase profits. The expansion also disrupted the ecological balance of Jinyun Mountain. In response, both government agencies and local environmental NGOs began ecological restoration efforts on Jinyun Mountain. They took charge of guiding and standardizing “farmstay” operations. Initially, operators resisted these changes, but the government facilitated constructive dialogues, assisted in creating business plans, and provided opportunities to learn modern management practices. These collaborative efforts transformed the business, leading many operators to upgrade to upscale guesthouses and enhance the ecological landscape. This attracted more tourists and increased revenue.

The positive effects extended beyond mere financial gains. For example, Sun, once an ordinary rural girl, became a “farmstay” proprietor and host. In her unique “little world,” she nurtured a love for gardening and taught her staff to make tea, coffee, and snacks. This transformation filled her with confidence and elegance, turning her business into a lifestyle.

These examples emphasize how economic and social progress provide key opportunities and favorable environment for the growth and empowerment of vulnerable groups, such as disadvantaged women. However, the government’s role is vital too. Traditional human rights theories advocating non-interference fall short in promoting the actual realization of human rights. Furthermore, contrary to traditional thinking, the idea and practice of human rights are not always in opposition; they can also work collaboratively. In conclusion, we contend that advancing human rights through development requires a proactive and dynamic government approach. It is also crucial to underscore and foster trust and cooperation between the government and the public, thereby forming an institutional framework that contributes positively to the sustainable advancement of human rights.
