

Gender Equality and Women's Development in China

Information Office of the State Council
of the People's Republic of China

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Foreword

China is a developing country with the largest population in the world. Of its total population of 1.3 billion, women account for about half. Therefore, the promotion of gender equality and the overall development of women is not only of great significance for China's development, it also has a special influence on the efforts for the advancement of mankind.

It has always been a basic state policy of China to promote equality between men and women. Since New China was founded in 1949, especially since the adoption of the reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s, and along with the continuous growth of China's economy and the overall progress of its society, women are being given more guarantees of enjoyment of equal rights and opportunities with men and the development of women is being given unprecedented opportunities.

In recent years, the Chinese government has made fairness and justice, with gender equality included, an important part of efforts to build a harmonious socialist society, and has utilized economic, legal, administrative, public opinion and other measures to ensure that women enjoy equal rights with men in terms of politics, economy, culture, and social and family life, and continuously pushes forward women's development in an all-round way.

The *Beijing Declaration* and the *Platform for Action* adopted at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 have produced great influence in promoting the progress of gender equality and women's development around the world. To commemorate the 10th anniversary of the conference, this white paper has been prepared to introduce to the rest of the world China's progress in promoting gender equality and women's development over the past decade.

I. State Mechanism to Promote Gender Equality and Development of Women

To promote gender equality and the development of women, China is making unremitting efforts to improve its legal system to protect the rights and interests of women, formulate and implement programs regarding women's development, further improve relevant working organs, increase financial input and strengthen social awareness.

The state has continuously intensified its efforts in the formulation, revision and enforcement of relevant laws and regulations to protect the legitimate rights and interests of women in earnest. As the supreme organ of state power and the top legislative organ of China, the National People's Congress and its Standing Committee have taken the protection of women's rights and interests and the promotion of gender equality as a key assignment, paid great attention to the formulation of laws concerning women, seriously dealt with bills related to the protection of women's legitimate rights and interests, and actively urged and supervised the enforcement and implementation of relevant laws. The Chinese government and its departments concerned have enforced laws and formulated and implemented relevant administrative rules and regulations to guarantee women's rights and interests, and promote gender equality. China now has built a complete legal system concerning the protection of women's rights and interests, and promotion of gender equality, based on the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, and with the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women as the main body and various separate laws and regulations, local regulations and adminis-

trative rules adopted by various government departments as supplementary provisions. The state judicial organs have augmented their law enforcement steps, and punished the perpetrators of various kinds of criminal infringements of women's rights and interests in accordance with the law.

The state has enacted and implemented outlines for the development of women, and included women's development in the overall plans of economic and social development. The *Outline for the Development of Chinese Women* is a national program of action to carry out the *Platform for Action* adopted in 1995 in Beijing and push forward gender equality and women's development in a comprehensive way. Since the goals set in the *Outline for the Development of Chinese Women (1995-2000)* have been basically realized, and to meet the demands of China's coordinated economic and social development and the requirements of the *UN Millennium Development Goals*, China promulgated in 2001 its *Outline for the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010)*. The new document outlines 34 major goals and 100 policies and measures in six fields: women and the economy; women's participation in decision-making and administration; women and education; women and health; women and the law; and women and the environment. The departments concerned under the State Council and local governments at all levels have all worked out their own programs for the implementation of the outline and plans for women's development in their respective areas.

The National Working Committee on Children and Women (NWCCW) under the State Council, the coordination and consultation organ of the Chinese government in charge of women and children's work, plays an important role in coordinating and promoting relevant government departments to do women and children's work well, as well as in formulating and organizing the implementation of the outlines for the development of women and children, providing necessary human, financial and material resources to the work on women and

children and to the development of women and children's cause, and guiding, encouraging and supervising the work of its subordinates in all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government. The current NWCCW is headed by a vice-premier of the State Council, and is composed of 33 member units (ministries, commissions under the State Council and non-governmental organizations — *ed.*) each having one of its vice-ministerial-level officials as a member of the NWCCW. To date, working organs on children and women have been set up by the people's governments of all provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government, prefectures (prefecture-level cities and leagues) and counties (county-level cities, districts and banners) across China's mainland, which are under the direction of officials of governments at the corresponding level. An effective working system has been built within these working committees to coordinate the functional departments and urge them to perform their duties. Their expenditures are covered in the financial budgets of the governments at the corresponding level.

The Chinese government attaches importance to the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) related to the development of women. The All-China Women's Federation, All-China Federation of Trade Unions, Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, China Disabled Persons' Federation and China Association of Science and Technology have all effectively pressed ahead with their gender equality work in line with their respective guidelines. The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) is the largest NGO in China dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's development. It has an organizational system that covers women's federations and group members at various levels, and enjoys wide representation and mass involvement. The ACWF and local women's federations play a significant role in uniting and motivating women to participate in the country's economic construction and social development, encouraging them to take an active part in the democratic management and supervi-

sion of state and social affairs, and representing and safeguarding the rights and interests of women as a whole. In recent years, government departments have cooperated with women's federations and other NGOs to organize all kinds of activities to effectively utilize social resources for the promotion of gender equality and women's development.

The central and local treasuries have both increased their inputs for the implementation of the outline for the development of women year by year, and optimized the allocation of resources to facilitate women's development. Since 2000, quite an amount of funds have been appropriated from the central and local treasuries to help achieve the key and difficult objectives that are difficult to fulfill in the outlines, with priority being given to the western and poverty-stricken areas. In 1990, the state input into women and children's health care and epidemic prevention and treatment stood at 305 million yuan and 1.203 billion yuan, respectively, which rose to 1.046 billion yuan and 3.388 billion yuan in 1999, and further to 1.579 billion yuan and 9.054 billion yuan in 2003. The state also pays great attention to the collection and study of statistics about the situation as regards women, and has set up a special organ to monitor and assess the implementation of the outline, and formulated a statistical monitoring indicator system and assessment program. In addition, networks for statistics monitoring and working systems have been established in various provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government. With the continuous improvement of the statistics-gathering and analysis systems by the departments concerned and gender statistics indicators added, a complete national gender statistics system has taken shape and is being constantly improved. Over the past decade, materials on gender statistics have been compiled and published by the state departments of statistics.

The Chinese government sets great store by cooperation with the United Nations and other international organizations, and has actively strengthened its exchanges and cooperation with other governments

and women's organizations around the world. China is serious about implementing international conventions. In May 2000, it submitted to the United Nations *The Report on the Implementation Result of the People's Republic of China of the "Beijing Declaration" and the "Platform for Action" Adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995*; in February 2004, it submitted *The Fifth and Sixth Regular Reports on the Implementation of the UN "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women;"* and in March 2005, it submitted *The Report on the Implementation of the People's Republic of China of the "Beijing Platform for Action" (1995) and the Document of Results of the 23rd UN General Assembly Special Session (2000).*

II. Women and the Economy

The state has made the guarantee of equal employment opportunities between women and men and the sharing of economic resources and results of social development the top priority for the advancement of gender equality and the development of women, and has worked out and adopted a series of policies and measures to ensure that women can equally participate in the economic development, enjoy equal access to economic resources and effective services, enhance their self-development ability and improve their social and economic status.

Encouraging women to start business and become re-employed. Employment is the basis of people's livelihood and the basic economic resource that women rely on for subsistence. Over the past few years, the Chinese government has formulated and carried out supportive policies to encourage women to start businesses on their own initiative, and give them preferential treatment when granting employment training subsidies and small-sum guaranteed loans and conducting tax reduction and exemption. In the meantime, governments at all levels have adopted many favorable policies toward women, such as creating public-welfare jobs, opening employment service centers, sponsoring special recruitment activities and vocational training courses, monitoring sex discrimination against women in employment and help women, especially laid-off women, to find new jobs. With the support of the government, women's federations at various levels, trade unions and other NGOs have conducted their work regarding the employment and re-employment of women in a creative way. During the period from 1998 to 2003, women's federations nationwide endeavored to get small-sum credit loans to directly aid a total of 2.5 million women to

get re-employed. Over the past decade, the number and ratio of women employed have remained fairly high. By the end of 2004, the number of both urban and rural women workers reached 337 million nationwide, accounting for 44.8 percent of the total employed; and the number of women workers in urban work units stood at 42.27 million, accounting for 38.1 percent of the national total.

Improving the employment structure of women. Over the past few years, the tertiary industry has become the main channel for providing jobs to women, and an increasing number of women are entering the computer, communications, finance and insurance and other high- and new-tech industries, thus becoming an important force in these fields. At present, women owners of small and medium-sized enterprises account for about 20 percent of the national total number of entrepreneurs, and 60 percent of them have emerged in the past decade. State organs, enterprises and public institutions have long pursued the principle of equality between men and women in terms of recruitment, training of professionals and technicians, as well as promotion in ranks and granting of professional titles to encourage women to display their abilities and come to the fore. By the end of 2004, women accounted for 43.6 percent of the total number of professionals and technicians in state-owned enterprises and institutions nationwide, up 6.3 percentage points over the 37.3 percent of 1995, among whom, the number of senior and intermediate-level women professionals and technicians rose from 20.1 percent and 33.4 percent to 30.5 percent and 42.0 percent, respectively.

Enhancing social security for urban women. In recent years, the Chinese government has stepped up the construction of a social security system, with pension insurance, unemployment insurance, medical insurance, employment injury insurance and maternity insurance as the main contents. It has also carried out significant reforms of the urban social relief system, and gradually established and improved three funds: minimum urban living guarantee fund, basic living guarantee

for laid-off workers fund and unemployment guarantee fund. The Trial Measures for Maternity Insurance of Enterprise Employees the state promulgated in 1994 put maternity insurance, which used to be borne by employers, under overall social planning. By the end of 2004, the practice of overall social planning had been introduced in 28 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government, with 43.84 million employees, or 60 percent of the total number of urban employees covered. In October 1999, the Regulations on the Minimum Standard of Living for Urban Residents went into effect. By the end of 2004, 22.05 million urban residents, including women, were receiving minimum subsistence allowances. All those who needed such help were by and large covered.

Giving full play to women's role in the rural economy. China is basically an agricultural country, and women account for more than 60 percent of the rural labor force and are a major force in farming activities. The Law of the People's Republic of China on Rural Land Contracting, which came into effect in 2003, states that women and men enjoy equal rights in contracting land in rural areas, and no organization or individual shall deprive women of the right to contract and operate land or infringe upon their right to do so. In recent years, the Chinese government has adopted active policies and measures to solve the problems concerning agriculture, rural areas and farmers, increased its input into agriculture, pushed forward tax reform in rural areas, and implemented the strategy of invigorating agriculture by applying science and technology. Government departments and women's federations at all levels have jointly organized activities to encourage rural women to acquire knowledge and learn science and technology, and compete in their development and contributions, so as to bring their role in invigorating and developing the rural economy into full play.

Safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of rural women working in cities. Over the past few years, the Chinese government has gradually reduced or eliminated the restrictive regulations on the em-

ployment of rural people in cities, and made great efforts to solve the problems of salaries in arrears, vocational safety, equal pay for equal work and social security for them so as to relieve rural migrant workers of anxieties regarding residence registration in cities and the schooling of their children, and actively protects the legitimate rights and interests of rural women working in cities. At the same time, the state also encourages and supports the building of training schools and legal aid centers, and the publication of typical cases of infringement as a means to raise awareness of their rights among migrant women workers and enhance their ability to safeguard their rights in accordance with the law.

To actively promote gender equality in employment and raise women's ability to find employment or start businesses, the Chinese government has begun to cooperate with the United Nations Development Program, International Labor Organization and other international organizations, with satisfactory results. At present, it is accelerating, proceeding from the national conditions of China, the process for the approval of the UN's *Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention* in China.

III. Women and Poverty Elimination

To alleviate and eliminate poverty is a goal that the Chinese government is determined to realize. With the implementation of large-scale and effective special poverty-reduction development programs, the government has succeeded in reducing the poverty-stricken rural population, the majority of whom are women, by 53.9 million — from 80 million in 1994 to 26.1 million in 2004.

Formulating preferential policies for the elimination of poverty among women. The *Outline for the Development of Chinese Women* puts forth the main goals of reducing the extent of poverty among and the number of poor women, and calls for more support for poverty-stricken women in the country's western development strategy, so that women will be the main receivers of poverty-reduction resources and the direct beneficiaries of the achievements of the poverty-reduction efforts. The state poverty-reduction program has made it clear that the government strives to further motivate women in the poverty-stricken areas to engage in household sideline production and the "courtyard economy," launch labor-intensive and other poverty-reduction projects that are particularly suitable for women, and organize women to learn practical skills and enhance their ability to shake off poverty and become well-off. At the Global Conference on Speeding Up Poverty Reduction, held in Shanghai in 2004, the Chinese government made a statement on its policy concerning the alleviation and elimination of poverty, which stressed the principle that, all factors being equal, preference will be given to poor women, and encouraged poor women to take part in poverty-reduction programs, and promised that the ratio of women participants would be no less than 40 percent of the total.

Adopting effective measures to gradually eliminate poverty among women in rural areas. Since 2001, the Chinese government has made sex indicator a component of the poverty monitoring work in rural areas, and stressed that attention should be paid to gender equality in the poverty-reduction work. In recent years, the government has increased its financial input into poverty-reduction work. In 2004 alone, 12.2 billion yuan was allocated by the central treasury for poverty reduction projects, and local governments also increased their inputs into this field. At the same time, and on the basis of the specific conditions in different areas, they have endeavored to help rural women get rid of poverty by way of provision of small-sum credit loans, labor export and pairing-off assistance. During the period from 2001 to 2004, a total of 13.52 billion yuan in small-sum credit loans for rural households was granted from the state poverty-reduction discount loans, and more than half of the money went to women. Since 2001, the Chinese government has taken poverty-reduction projects in the form of participation of the poor as the main way to "enhance the whole village," and such projects now cover 148,000 poverty-stricken villages nationwide.

Supporting and encouraging NGOs to help women get rid of poverty and become well-off. In recent years, thanks to the support and initiative of the Chinese government, women's federations at all levels have launched, in view of local conditions, the "Poverty-Reduction Action for Women" with provision of small-sum credit loans, poverty elimination group by group, labor export, pairing-off assistance and mutual help between the eastern and western parts of the country as the main contents. The China Population Welfare Foundation has launched "Happiness Project" with an aim to help poor mothers. It raises funds to help poor mothers participate in economic and social development, and enhance their health and cultural level. The project of "Love of the Earth, Water Cellars for Mothers," initiated by the China Women's Development Foundation, has raised funds for building more than 90,000 rain-water collecting cellars and 1,100 small central water sup-

ply projects in the water-short northwest part of China, benefiting nearly one million poverty-stricken people. In addition, women's federations and other NGOs have tried every means to get international funds and material aid to support the poverty-reduction projects and help women in poverty-stricken areas improve their lot.