

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

CHINA

China's recent, rapid economic growth has created new opportunities and challenges for women. While the rise of the industrial sector has enabled millions of women to earn a living wage, women frequently must migrate to industrial centers to seek these job opportunities. Coming from rural or less-developed areas, these migrant women workers often lack formal higher education or professional experience and are thus susceptible to labor exploitation. Meanwhile, rural women who stay in their hometowns remain vulnerable to economic hardships, particularly in the aftermath of natural disasters.

The Asia Foundation's Women's Empowerment Program works closely with our local partners to address these challenges and ensure that women can be a key contributor to development in China. The program advances women's empowerment through education, increasing economic security, mitigating the effects of natural disasters, and helping women access their legal rights.

The Foundation has supported programs in China since 1979, related to legal development, disaster management, environmental protection, and constructive U.S.-China relations.

MIGRANT WOMEN WORKERS

Each year, millions of rural Chinese migrate to China's major manufacturing hubs in search of employment and a better life. Half of these migrants are young women. Most are in their 20s, have little education or work experience, scant knowledge of their rights under China's existing labor laws, and are unaware of the existing social services and networks available to them. The combination of these conditions makes migrant women workers vulnerable to labor exploitation and potential abuse by their employers.

Since 1999, The Asia Foundation has implemented groundbreaking programs in China to help protect



migrant women workers, including labor law awareness and occupational safety education; provision of legal aid; strengthening enforcement of existing labor laws to increase protection of workers; facilitating integration of migrant women into their new communities; and giving women the opportunity to enhance their professional skills and continue their education. To date, our pioneering migrant women workers programs have reached more than 910,000 migrant women workers working in more than 20 provinces/municipalities across China.

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Recognizing that economic empowerment is key to poverty alleviation, our women's empowerment program in China works directly with women to develop income-generating projects and strengthen the capacity of local women's groups to identify and address issues related to poverty and long-term development in their own communities.

For example, to encourage and increase entrepreneurship skills and economic opportunities for migrant workers, The Asia Foundation is supporting migrant workers to start or improve their small businesses through technical training, networking opportunities, and access to credit. In addition, in partnership with the Xinjiang Women's Federation, The Foundation

piloted a project to assist rural ethnic minority women in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region to become more financially secure by enhancing the quality and marketing of their products; forming professional cooperatives or increasing the capacity of existing ones; and providing microloans for income generation products.

NATURAL DISASTER RECOVERY

Natural disasters strike indiscriminately and frequently, those with the least stand to lose the most. The 2008 earthquake that struck Sichuan province in central China killed at least 69,000 people, injured hundreds of thousands, and left 15 million homeless. Women are often the pillars of these earthquake-affected Sichuan

communities. These women are not only responsible for income-generation, but must also care for children and the elderly. The earthquake exacerbated the challenges that these women face, including heightened stress and isolation. To address the distinct needs of these women, The Asia Foundation is working with local partners to provide immediate services to rural women, ranging from psychosocial counseling and housing repair, to longer-term assistance to improve women's livelihoods and ensure that their voices are heard throughout the recovery and rebuilding process. Despite the devastation of the earthquake, women from affected communities are now rebuilding their lives and communities to be stronger than they were before with support from The Asia Foundation.

THE MAY 2008 EARTHQUAKE DESTROYED 80 PERCENT OF THE HOUSES

in Zhou Xingbi's Mu'er Village in Sichuan Province, including her own. Under an Asia Foundation-supported project, Zhou received a small grant to rebuild her house and participated in training on alternative income generation to supplement her previous work in the fields. She was excited to find, after participating in product development and marketing trainings supported by the project, that she could earn additional income from selling her hand-made embroidery products. What really helped change Zhou's perspective on her role in her village was being elected by her fellow villagers to head the local women's group that is responsible for managing and supervising project-supported recovery plans. She went from a shy woman who never spoke in public to organizing village conferences, announcing village recovery plans to the villagers, and talking with village heads to get their buy-in on recovery plans. At the same time, she learned how to keep financial accounts, conduct marketing events, and monitor the quality of the roads and animal pens built with project funds. Through these new responsibilities, Zhou became confident communicating with different people and speaking in public. After one year in this role, the villagers and village heads recognized her progress and made her a member of the village committee.



Women's group member Zhou Xingbi stands on a road selected to be rebuilt in an earthquake recovery project.

OUR DONORS MAKE OUR PROGRAMS POSSIBLE

With contributions from individuals, corporations, foundations, and public funders, The Asia Foundation is able to create and expand successful programs that make a significant difference in the lives of girls and women across the Asia-Pacific region. To support our programs, or to learn more about us, please visit the Women's Empowerment Program page at: www.asiafoundation.org.

The Asia Foundation is a private, non-profit, non-governmental organization working to advance mutual interests of the United States and the Asia-Pacific region. It is funded by contributions from corporations, foundations, individuals, and governmental organizations in the U.S., Europe, Canada, Australia, and Asia, and an annual appropriation from the U.S. Congress. Through its programs, the Foundation builds leadership, improves policies, and strengthens institutions to foster greater openness and shared prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region.



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