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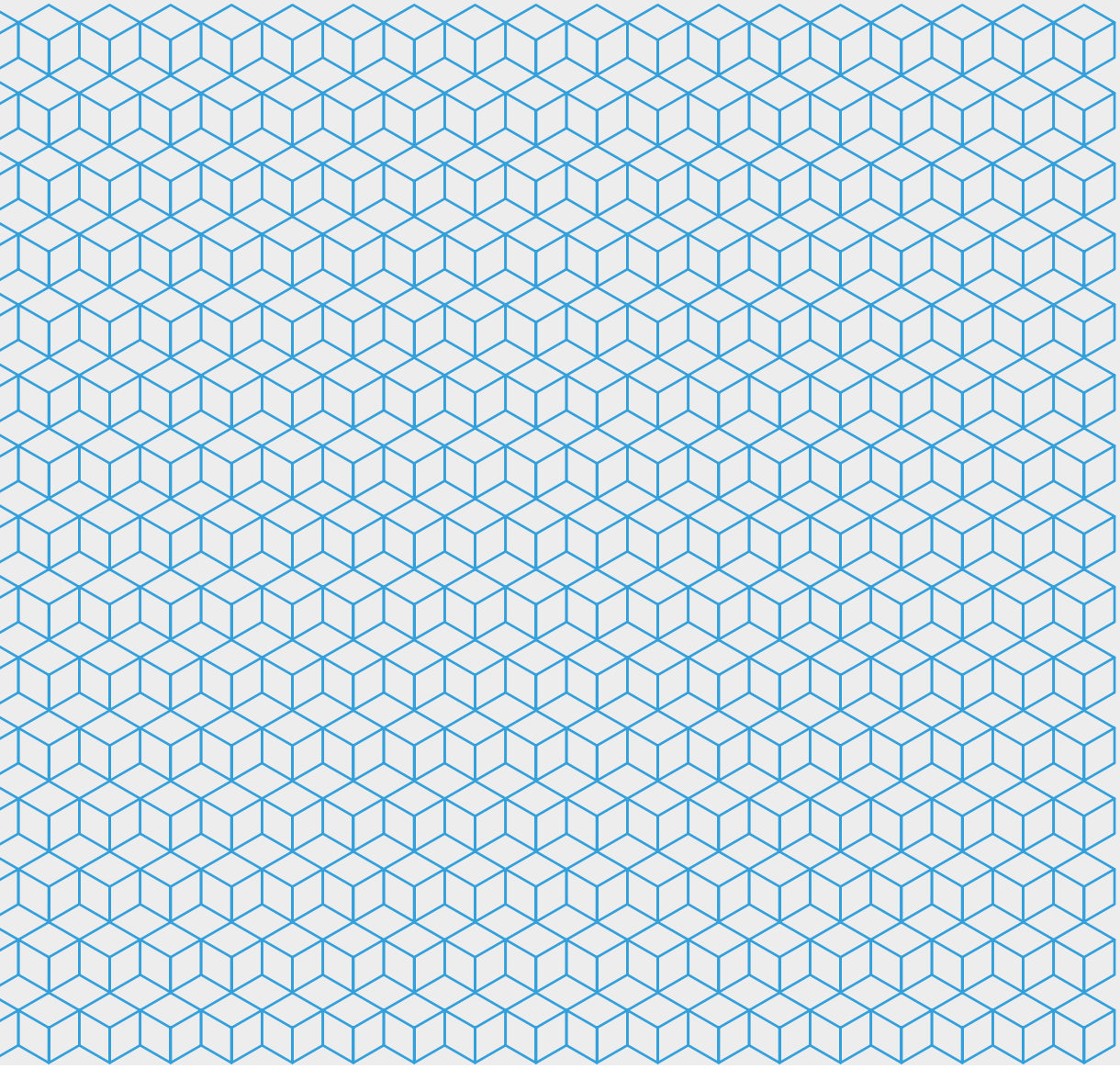

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Acknowledgement

Since its founding in 1996, China Development Brief has strived to provide high-quality, independent reporting on Chinese civil society. Throughout 2021, we have published a range of informative news, analysis and interview pieces designed to inform and educate our readers on the issues facing social organizations and foreign NGOs operating in China. In addition, we have continued to provide readers with the latest news on rules and regulations that might have an impact on the sector.

While there have been few opportunities for international partners and practitioners to visit China this year, due to the continuing impact of Covid-19, we have still been able to play a vital role by providing a window into the country for people living overseas.

Since I took over as English Communications Director in August, I have been impressed by the range of articles written and translated by our staff. In this edition of the annual newsletter, I am especially proud to share with readers some of the interviews China Development Brief has conducted with people working to improve the lives of the disadvantaged. Features on inspiring individuals such as Tan Ting, China's first deaf lawyer, have really made the articles a pleasure to edit.

Finally, a big thank you must go to all the people who visit our website and interact with our social media accounts. Thank you for continuing to support our work.

James Skinner

English Communications Director

1

Combating humanitarian crises with care: Vivian Tan

2021-04-30
Isabella Jingwen Zhong

Worldwide, the number of the people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution exceeded 80 million by the end of 2020. UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, works in more than 135 countries to protect and assist these people. It may surprise some that UNHCR has been working in China for more than four decades, transitioning from supporting the government to care for Indo-Chinese refugees in 1979 to assisting a few hundred urban refugees today. China Development Brief conducted interviews with several staff from the organisation in March. The current article summarises the interview CDB did with Ms Vivian Tan, UNHCR Representative ad interim in China.

Coming from a mass communication and media background, Tan worked as a journalist for eight years in Singapore. In 2002, she joined UNHCR and has worked there ever since, apart from a short secondment with another UN agency.

Tan revealed her decision to join UNHCR was partially due to her father's influence. He was also a journalist who covered refugee stories in the border area between Thailand and Cambodia in the late 1970s. "The influence of my father's passion in reporting refugees' lives is always at the back of my mind," Tan said. "Another reason for me to leave my comfortable life in Singapore was that I felt there had to be something more out there; I wanted to make a difference in the world."

Vivian Tan, UNHCR Representative ad interim in China. Credit: UNHCR

According to UNHCR, about one percent of humanity have been forced to flee their homes by the end of 2020. Some 26 million of them are refugees. Another 50 million are internally-displaced people (IDP) who are forced to flee their homes but stay within their own countries. The term "refugee" applies to people who flee across the border to another, usually neighbouring country.

When they arrive in a foreign country with only the clothes on their backs, refugees face additional difficulties such as a different language, culture as well as a very pressing issue, legal status and the associated rights. "If people ever have a choice, they would stay in their own countries. Refugees are people who genuinely do not have a choice," said Tan. "Their reality has forced them to take the extra step. Once they cross an international border, they lose the protection of their government and are often denied their rights, freedoms and social welfare."

Conflict, war and unrest are part of the common factors that drive people out of their homeland. "If you take a look at the top five countries where refugees are coming from, they are either at war, or experiencing civil conflicts and socio-political turbulence." However, reasons for displacement are growing. "For example, many Somalis initially fled their country because of civil war in the 1990s, but now the situation has been compounded by drought and famine. The push factor of conflict nowadays is more frequently mixed with other factors, such as extreme weather caused by climate change," said Tan.

Local to global

China signed both the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol in 1982. Tan told CDB some refugees living in the country initially came on business or study visas. But when it came time to repatriate, they found their home countries at war or in political unrest, and were unable to go back. That is when some approach UNHCR to seek asylum.

"While the documents we issue are generally respected by the authorities, refugees and asylum-seekers do not have a legal status and cannot systematically access basic services, their children struggle to attend schools, and they cannot work legally."

Healthcare and education are two other challenges. "In UNHCR, we have a system where we try to reimburse some refugees' medical costs, yet it is not very sustainable. If refugees are able to access medical or health insurance, it can help them stay out of debt." The same appeal applies

to education for refugee children. "Currently, there are five provinces in China which allow refugee children to attend public school. UNHCR hopes to broaden it beyond the five provinces and when necessary, we intervene to ensure that children in those provinces can attend local schools so that they don't become a lost generation."

Refugee students and local students going to school together in Iran. Credit: UNHCR/Mohammad Hossein

Tan stressed refugees generally would prefer not to rely on assistance if they can use their skills to work and provide for themselves and their families. Moreover, due to limited resources, cash assistance from UNHCR covers only part of their needs. "Here, the biggest need becomes an environment that allows them to become self-reliant."

Tan noted that because many refugees cannot return to their home countries yet due to various reasons, a main solution for them currently is resettlement to a third country. Refugees are allowed to stay until they are resettled.

But globally, the demand for resettlement far exceeds the supply as very few countries offer resettlement programmes. As a result, resettlement is not guaranteed and even if it occurs, can take a long time. "That is why we have been working hard to expand the channel, including through complementary pathways such as private sponsorships and family reunification."

As refugees around the world wait for durable solutions to their plight, UNHCR prioritises protection for refugee women and children. Tan explained gender inequality is why UNHCR retains such a focus. "Women, because of gender or many of the cultural and social associations with gender, are often more exposed to some of the risks that refugees face. Gender-based violence is certainly a big risk for women. In fact, with the COVID-19 pandemic taking place, we have unfortunately seen a sharp rise in gender-based violence cases globally, ranging from domestic violence to early marriage.

"The pandemic has made it more difficult for cases to be reported as well as for us to reach out to victims," she added. "We are really trying – if we can visit victims of violence in a city or a camp, we will travel and work with local NGOs to provide support, or we will arrange phone counselling and virtual support sessions."

Refugees from Sudan are queuing to get life necessities in Jamjang refugee camp, South Sudan. Credit: UNHCR/Elizabeth Stuart

"Children also tend to be at the forefront of the impact of forced displacement. Because they are underage, they are more exposed to exploitation and violence. Their physical security and mental health are both at risk. Often, refugee children have seen terrible things when they flee their countries with adults, they are often traumatised, and these issues are sometimes not addressed sufficiently."

One way that UNHCR has dealt with these issues is through education. "Globally UNHCR works with agencies such as UNICEF and Save the Children, to make sure that refugee children can access basic education," said Tan who admitted that even before the pandemic, it was a challenge for refugee children to receive education and COVID-19 has undoubtedly increased the hurdles. Like many other organisations, UNHCR in some refugee settings still relies on education programmes carried out through the internet, television and radio. The agency encourages refugee children and their parents to continue learning despite the obstacles.

In some developed countries, systematic aid is more likely

to be given to refugees by local NGOs and government entities: language lessons, accommodations and sometimes, job placements. But during the COVID-19 pandemic, a rather interesting phenomenon can be observed: in 90 countries across the globe, refugees stepped up and tried to offer their help against the disease, from making masks in refugee camps to cooking meals for frontline workers. Some refugees who are medical professionals offered their skills and expertise to help care for citizens from the host countries.

Tan strongly emphasised that refugees want to contribute, in both normal times and during a deadly pandemic. "We need to give them a chance instead of marginalising them. It is beneficial for all the parties if refugees can be included into the host country's national systems so they can also contribute to society."

Globally, UNHCR maintains strategic partnerships with more than 900 partners including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governmental institutions and the United Nations agencies. "It is evident that UNHCR needs NGOs; much of our global work cannot proceed without their help. NGOs have expertise and local networks that we might not have, and they know the local context well. In fact, what NGOs are doing is an extension of what we do."

Peace, the missing piece

Tan shared her experience in Bangladesh working with Rohingya refugees from Myanmar. In 2017, violence broke out in Myanmar's Rakhine State and drove more than 742,000 people to seek refuge in Bangladesh across the border. "I was in Bangladesh working as UNHCR's spokesperson. It was intense seeing people arriving after walking for days or weeks, coming on the boats, carrying their babies and walking to shore. I felt I had a responsibility to tell their stories, to let people outside learn what has been happening, why refugees are coming to Bangladesh and what they need. Telling their stories was also a significant way to mobilise support, be it funding, political support, or campaigns appealing to stop what has been driving them out of their homeland." It was a challenging time for her, recounted Tan, and she vividly remembered working around the clock talking to new arrivals, documenting their stories while taking endless media calls. She talked herself hoarse, and at night she found it hard to fall asleep. She said horrendous stories refugees had told her lingered in her mind. Despite the intensity, Tan felt very fulfilled. "I felt I was doing something concrete, and it reminded me why I left Singapore and chose to join UNHCR."

But the lack of real solutions for refugees is a lingering frustration. Much humanitarian assistance has been provided to refugees, but that assistance is subject to other factors, among them donor support. "In protracted refugee situations, people lose interest. There is donor fatigue. Even aid and funding from governmental organisations are hard to maintain when situations look like they will never be resolved…We can help on a humanitarian front, but it takes the international community to politically resolve these conflicts. The wars and unrest have lasted for years or decades in countries like Syria, Somalia and Afghanistan. If they are not solved, the refugees cannot go back home; and as the wars and unrest continue, the number of refugees will only keep growing."

Vivian Tan with Afghan refugees at the voluntary repatriation centre in Peshawar, Pakistan, 2006. Credit: UNHCR

So, what can be done?

"Sufficient funding is important to maintain the level of support to refugees; also resolving wars and unrest once and for all in refugee-producing countries, so people can go back home safely and sustainably."

Now in Beijing as UNHCR Representative ad interim in China, Tan expressed hopes for how China can contribute to resolving the long-standing refugee situation. UNHCR has been working closely with the Chinese government in areas where interests align, from addressing the root causes of conflict, to emergency management and procurement of goods and services. China's active involvement in international affairs, massive production capacities and

extensive experience in disaster relief are great strengths that UNHCR hopes to leverage to help solve refugee problems.

"Over the years, China has consistently increased its support for refugees. It was one of the countries that adopted and actively endorsed the Global Compact on Refugees; it has also supported refugees and displaced persons in Angola, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, and other countries through China's South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund. This year, we are launching two new projects with this Fund in Afghanistan and East Africa to assist refugees and frontline workers against COVID-19."

Human resources are another area of collaboration. Like many other organisations, UNHCR pays attention to building relationships with young people. UNHCR Beijing arranges regular talks with university students and promotes basic understanding of global refugee issues. What strikes Tan is that young people are not only curious about refugee situations worldwide, but they are also keen on searching for sustainable solutions.

"We have a range of jobs waiting for adventurous, curious and dedicated youth who want to make a difference. Ninety percent of our work takes place in the field, which means our staff need to go to places where physical environments might be remote and tough. Our work is rewarding and satisfying, and one reason is that we are always in direct contact with the people whom we help. We are able to know them in person and see tangible results our work produces."

"China is underrepresented in the United Nations," said Tan, "in the sense that there is not a large number of Chinese staff in UN agencies, including UNHCR. We hope to tap more into the human resources in China." Tan mentioned the Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) programme where young professionals can apply for UNHCR positions globally through the China Scholarship Council (CSC). Students and recent graduates can also apply for global internships through the CSC.

For Tan, the first step and a vital part of "solving refugee problems" is to raise awareness of refugees' real situation. UNHCR China is doing so through some of the Chinese JPOs who are sharing their experiences in places where they are based. "Story-telling is a powerful method, and through our Chinese JPOs, we hope to bridge the gap between the domestic audience and refugees." Indeed, voices of refugees and asylum-seekers deserve to be heard and their stories deserve to be told. "Refugees had no choice but to flee their own homes," said Tan. "They deserve to be given a chance to live with dignity."

2

Gender equality is about women and men, young and old: Zhang Jun

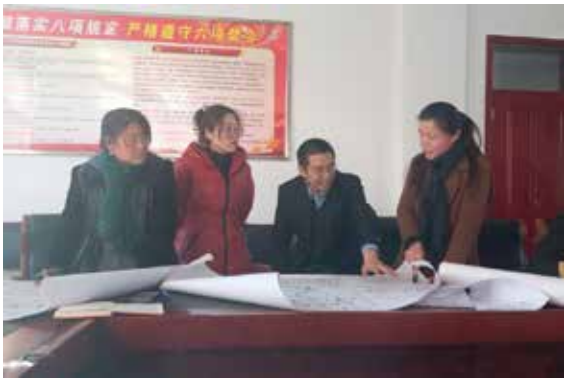
2021-06-18
Isabella Jingwen Zhong

Gender-related issues have rarely stayed out of the spotlight and they are addressed with varying characteristics in different countries. Globally, according to OCHA[1] and reports from the Guardian[2], the mindset towards gender-related issues has evolved from considering them as only a women's issue with solutions coming from the leadership of men to viewing them as everyone's issue with solutions demanding cooperation between women and men. Looking back at the history of gender equality development in China, progress can be evidently noticed despite gender-related issues still being dominantly regarded as only women's issues and something that will dissolve once women and girls are given more resources. China Development Brief recently talked to Mr. Zhang Jun, director of Shaanxi Gender Development Solution (GDS), about existing gender-related issues facing China and his journey of promoting and contributing to gender equality as a man.

Understanding gender equality

Zhang first encountered the concept of gender equality in the domain of children's education. When he participated in a collaborative children's education programme between China and the UK in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region in 1999, he was surprised to realise there were gender specialists among all the foreign experts. But through this programme, he recognised far more young girls than boys dropped out of school from poor households in rural Ningxia.

This programme gave Zhang new insights into the equality of education opportunities. In 2000, Zhang joined Plan International (China), an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) operating in Shaanxi Province, to continue working on children's education programmes. He realised that "gender equality" had become a norm in INGOs and had to be applied to all the programmes he supervised. "Beyond equal education opportunities for both boys and girls, one important lesson I learnt through these experiences is: the precondition of gender equality is respect. Whoever you are dealing with, either they are of the same sex or the opposite sex to you, you have to give them your respect." In 2014, Zhang joined GDS, which used to be called Shaanxi Gender Development Training Centre.



Zhang Jun and his colleagues. Source: Zhang Jun

Women's movement in China

The Chinese women's movement goes back to as early as the May Fourth Movement in 1919, more than a century ago. Gender equality had been promoted during the May Fourth Movement, although its most significant impact was mainly on urban elite women. Later in Yan'an, a city that served as one of the headquarters of the Communist Party of China (CPC), equality between men and women was also stressed through various approaches, such as CPC guidelines and artwork. Moving to 1949, the first law published in the newly established People's Republic of China was the Marriage Law, in which gender equality was once again emphasised. Gender equality was later even enshrined as a basic state policy.

However, one commonality of these events, Zhang pointed out, is limited women's involvement in the leadership. If gender equality focuses on uplifting women's social

status and ensuring they enjoy the same rights as their male counterparts, he argues both men and women need to participate and contribute to achieve gender equality. He said that in the contemporary moment, women have realised the importance of leadership in events affecting them and their rights. "Women should be leaders in their own movements rather than being led by men," said Zhang. "And men should recognise women's leadership in women's movement and gender equality and facilitate them to pursue equality. Women need to speak for themselves on how their status in society, family and workplace needs to be raised and have their rights fully respected."

In China, gender equality has always meant "equality between men and women". In theory, this does not seem to have any problem. Yet, in practice, especially in different social settings, Zhang commented that "men" and "women" are terms that are too general, and they tend to neglect individual differences. "Men and women from different economic and educational backgrounds may not hold the same views on gender equality and social roles of men and women. For example, a woman from a rural village and a woman in urban areas, their opinions [on topics above] are likely to be different."

Not just a women's issue

One reason Zhang upholds women's leadership in gender equality and men's involvement through facilitating roles is the notion that pursuing gender equality must not be simply contextualised as "solving women's problems." As a matter of fact, men are part of the causes of gender inequality and still reinforce it. "I sometimes think men need to be at least 50 percent responsible for gender inequality. For example, when domestic violence happens, people always tend to blame women and find issues on them. But the fact is, men are mostly the perpetrators in domestic violence cases; do they not have any responsibility? Of course they do. If it is the case, then it is 'men's problems' that need to be solved, rather than women's problems."

But one thing people may not notice is women are not the only victims of existing the gender inequality that penetrates into nearly every part of society. Men also face harms brought by gender-specific issues, for example, rigid gender norms[3]. Zhang mentioned a scandal of the Spring Buds Plan as an example. The Spring Buds Plan was an educational programme launched by the China Children and Teenagers' Fund (CCTF) specifically set up to fund young girls in poor, rural areas to finish school and pursue their careers. In 2019, the Spring Buds Plan was revealed to be using their funds to support more than 400 boys in rural China without giving special notice in their funding plans. While this scandal led to online criticism and had detrimental impact on CCTF's credibility, Zhang expressed a slightly different angle."I fully agree that CCTF's conduct has damaged its own reputation and its transparency has to be urgently improved. But I think this incident should also trigger us to ask, 'is it only young girls who need help? How about young boys in poor places?'"

Zhang's field work experience told him that young boys in rural China do need opportunities to receive education and develop their career, just as young girls do. In a recent educational programme also in Ningxia, Zhang and his colleagues realised that in areas of greater ethnic minority density, among children in junior high school between 12 and 16, the number of boys who quit school was double that of girls. What is noticeable is only eight percent of them quit school due to poverty; 48 percent of the causes of leaving school are not related to the family's ability to afford tuition fees. One prominent cause Zhang referenced is the conventional ideas of being a man or a woman. "Parents nowadays do not want their high school-age daughters to quit school early, yet for boys, they hold an idea that men must be the sole breadwinners and always provide for the family. So, boys actually quit school at an early age to find jobs and earn money. This is an example of boys as the victims of gender stereotypes. That is why I think when talking about gender equality, one needs to consider equality of rights, responsibilities, opportunities, and freedoms of both men and women."

Training the gender equality programme instructors in Ningxia. Source: Zhang Jun

In addition to women's lack of involvement in leading the gender equality movement, there are still too few leaders who are women in local governments and the business sector. In the Global Gender Gap Report, China's ranking dropped from the 60th place in 2009 to the 107th place in 2021. From Zhang's own experience of working with women in rural areas, he told CDB although requirements stipulating a certain number of women have leadership in village "two committees"[4] have helped women reach a certain percentage, in practice, this number does not represent women's real ability to be involved in decision-making. "Many women are elected to the two committees as a token to fulfill the numbers, not because they are willing to run for office. A lot of men also doubt if women are 'fit' to make important decisions for the village, insisting that women do not know much about politics."

Gender equality in the 21st century

Zhang has worked hard to promote gender equality for more than two decades. His experience has shown him different facets of this sector. For example, moving from an INGO to a local NGO, Zhang discerned the difference between their working methods. According to Zhang, INGOs have a set of well-structured, well-reasoned analysis frameworks and tools. However, when Zhang moved to the local NGO, he realised INGOs' methods did not work well there. Most of the frameworks, tools and discourses that are common in INGOs can merely be used by local NGOs to apply for foreign funding. There is an obvious mismatch between INGOs' and local NGOs' vocabularies, analysis methods and working styles despite them working on the same social issue.

But since the mid-2010s, international NGOs have slowly begun leaving China. Since then, Zhang found there are fewer operating programmes primarily focusing on gender equality. What also deserves more attention is analyses on social justice and equality from a gender perspective; most commentators still view social advancement from a purely economic or political angle. Zhang urges the exploration of new methods, tools and perspectives when understanding social development, especially gender equality in China. "As our society advances and contains richer diversity, people will view and analyse 'gender' quite differently. My hope is, different groups in society are able to redefine and reframe the concept and standard of 'gender equality.'"

The COVID-19 pandemic is a turning point, as it revealed gender inequalities that are present but had been very much overlooked. For example, statistics show that women have made up 80 percent of the medical, healthcare, community and front line workers. This revelation has prompted GDS to prioritise women's physical and mental health during the pandemic.

Since the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan was announced in March 2021, Zhang saw a clear signal from the government to help marginalised groups and the poorest through encouraging the work of NGOs. A large proportion of this population consists of women and young girls. In 2020, China declared victory in ending extreme poverty across the country. So to further help marginalised groups, Zhang stressed attention must now shift from offering financial aid to empowering people with opportunities to grow and advance. "Certainly, the government is offering help, but considering the sheer size of our country, at the current stage, the government can only cover the basic social protection and services to serve the population's general needs. But organisations like GDS are able to visit each individual case and find out their unique needs." Based on the latest five-year plan and new societal setting, GDS has also launched new programmes in 2021 that aim to mitigate and remove factors that prevent marginalised women and young girls from obtaining opportunities to achieve personal and vocational development.

Since the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, the government has shown increased awareness of gender equality. Very soon after the conference, "equality between men and women" was proposed as a basic state policy to enhance social development in China. Seventeen years later in 2013, "equality between men and women" was officially written in the Work Report of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as one of the basic state policies. Accordingly, a set of laws and guidelines were revised or published to provide legal and policy frameworks for reaching gender equality, such as the Law on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women, Population and Family Planning Law, Anti-domestic Violence Law, and Outlines for the Development of Women. Companies and institutions have begun introducing practical measures for gender equality, and gender studies are now part of social science and humanity curricula in universities and research centres.

But the Fourth World Conference on Women also held great significance as non-governmental organisations were observed alongside national leaders and the United Nations agencies. This greatly encouraged NGOs in China which had just emerged and were slowly on the rise.

Gender equality for the youth

Apart from programmes in the field helping marginalised women and young girls, Shaanxi Gender Development Solution (GDS) has a vision to promote gender equality among the youth. It has already launched programmes to help university students better understand gender equality, and now, the organisation's director, Zhang Jun, reckons it's time to reach out to even younger children. "Before, we mainly focused on introducing gender equality to university students, but now we want this concept to be offered to primary and junior high school students, and children in nurseries in the near future. We think it is crucial to talk about gender equality to children once they start to realise their sex."

University students joined the gender equality programme of GDS. Source: Zhang Jun

Zhang said conversations he had with young children at school gave him the idea for the initiative. "I asked children, 'whose status is higher in your family? Your mother or father?' Many children would say immediately, 'my dad gives all his salary to my mum, so my mum's status is higher than my dad!'" Zhang said children's answers to his question reflect how adults view the connection between family status and gender equality nowadays. "People are still used to use financial indicators, such as a person's income, to measure status and judge if men and women have achieved equality. But this is not an accurate way to view gender equality… As I stressed earlier, gender equality is more relevant to rights, freedoms, opportunities and capabilities. In a very wealthy society, women might still be placed at a subordinate position compared to men. In this case, wealth and economic advancement cannot represent gender equality."

"To a great extent, economic advancement will help lift up women's status," Zhang explains. "When women have higher income, and are able to enjoy the benefits brought by economic advancement, such as more opportunities and resources, their social and family status is very likely to be improved. But economic advancement is not the same as better gender equality; no solid evidence shows that they have an absolute positive correlation."

One possible reason people have established the connection between economic development and gender equality may be the stark contrasts in social conditions over time. Indeed, if women of young generations compared their lives with their mothers and grandmothers, they will see great progress within a time span of several decades. But with progress, can come a deep-rooted mindset that Zhang recognised earlier – that women are the "problems" and achieving gender equality is to help "solve women's problems." "For example, when nurseries were set up across China so parents could send young children there during the day, many people's first reaction was 'now, women do not need to look after their children in the daytime and they can do something else, so their problem has been solved!' But is what people regard as a 'problem' here really a problem? Or should we not ask 'whose problem it is?' If gender-related issues are mostly viewed as 'women's problems,' this kind of language will lead to blind spots for gender equality. On the other hand, language like this will help cover social issues linked to gender that are waiting to be solved," claimed Zhang.

In addition, Zhang argues that comparing the past and the present will give people some insights on the progress that has been made, yet this vertical comparison cannot tell the whole story. Another comparison that people make much less is the horizontal comparison, namely, how gender equality has been displayed in different sections across society in policies, law, work, education as well as history, culture and social customs. "We should always ask, how these sections in society influence women and men? Are they treated with equal consideration? Will this affect the way that women and men view each other in society, work

and family?"

An early start

Before GDS brought its gender equality programme to primary and junior high schools, Zhang and his colleagues researched the gender equality awareness of children from ages 6 to 16, their parents as well as school teaching staff. GDS found school-aged children tend to not conform to conventional gender norms as wider society more frequently does. But it can be seen that primary school pupils have stronger gender equality awareness than pupils in junior high schools, and girls stronger than boys. Secondly, students' awareness of gender equality in school settings is stronger than in family and work settings. Thirdly, for teaching staff, primary school teachers consider conventional gender norms less seriously than junior high school teachers, but in general, teachers' gender equality awareness is more at a theoretical level than a practical level. School teachers are also not sufficiently sensitive to content in textbooks that does not endorse gender equality. Although both headmasters and teaching staff are keen to support launching gender equality education programmes in school, they lack the necessary skills, technology and guidelines for implementation, according to Zhang's research. Finally, GDS found that gender equality awareness among parents was much weaker than that of school staff; and there is an evident difference of gender equality awareness among parents from different parts of the country.

Gender equality programme instructor with young girls and their family. Source: Zhang Jun

Based on the research results, it can be noted that children of younger age and staff who are teaching younger children tend to have better gender equality awareness. Zhang's understanding of this is that it is easier to integrate gender equality elements to school life during primary school, before the time students begin considering future career paths. But in high school, they will have the option of going to normal high school or vocational school after graduation. While thinking of their future careers, they may receive advice from teachers, parents or mentors based on conventional gender norms instead of being encouraged to consider abilities, passion, merit and character. This kind of advice is likely to affect their final decision.

To tackle this situation, GDS has prepared career planning workshops for students in high school. In these workshops, the very first thing students are asked to do is to think: Who am I? Am I a boy or a girl? What can I do well? What profession might fit my personality? The materials used in the workshops are gender equality-focused which will help children to consider their future career by thinking beyond the box of existing gender norms.

But what about children of pre-school age? Zhang demonstrates it is important to engage these small children and their parents into gender equality education as well. "When children begin to form the notion of 'gender,' we should begin telling them about gender equality." And this education should start with parents. "From giving children names to buying their toys, parents are giving children signals about their gender. Therefore, introducing gender equality to young couples will prevent them from passing unequal gender norms to kids from an early age."

Another experience of working with women village leaders has confirmed GDS's plan to educate young couples and their children about gender equality. "One programme we did was in Heyang (in Henan Province) with the Women Village Leaders' Association to help them search for better strategies to solve village issues. We did an analysis from a gender perspective to figure out these women leader's needs and then realised that even though they were all in high positions, almost all of them had very low self-esteem. From the stories they shared with us, we can grasp the difficulties they had as leaders: less resources were given to them and they received more criticisms. And the main cause of these difficulties is because of their gender. So, what many of these women leaders do is to become very masculine, that is being aggressive, violent and short-tempered. They believe behaving that way will weaken their image as women and make men in the village listen to them, and sadly, most of the time, the reality confirms with their belief." When Zhang and his colleagues asked the

women leaders what can be done to solve the hard situation faced by them and prevent this from happening to future generations, the vast majority of them responded with the answer: educating the young children.

Environment and health training programme held for women in the village. Source: Zhang Jun

"Pursuing gender equality is never to solve issues of one gender," said Zhang. "We have to make sure that we pay equal attention to the other gender, too." Zhang stresses that women and men must both participate in this process equally. "Women need to grow confidence within themselves, and lead their movement to equal status, rights, freedoms and opportunities with men in every social aspect, never considering themselves as subordinate because they were born a woman." As for men, Zhang said, they "should support gender equality through facilitating women during this process. Reflect on their mindset and behaviours, and see if there is anything that may cause women to suffer and face more difficult situations than they would. Meanwhile, men should not limit themselves in the conventional gender norms, which in a way may benefit them, but in another way may trap them in a box too."

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3

Hope on the streets: one man's mission to help Shanghai's homeless

2021-10-18
James Skinner

The following is the first part of an interview conducted with the founder of an organization that helps the homeless in Shanghai. All names used in this article have been changed at the request of the organization.

The past couple of decades have seen increasing numbers of foreigners coming to China for work or study, enticed by the country's booming economy and numerous opportunities. While some might find their life taking an unexpected path in the Middle Kingdom, it's a fair bet that most won't end up opening a pioneering center for the homeless.

It's reasonably common to see homeless people on the streets of big cities in Europe and North America, but the problem is not so visible in China. For those without somewhere to stay at night, there are sometimes government-run shelters where they can go. However, some have good reasons not to seek help.

David, 47, initially came to China to study Chinese at Shanghai's East China Normal University. There, the Dallas-born American became active in a local English corner where he spoke to other attendees about his experiences of volunteering at a youth shelter back in the United States. Curious about what services were available for homeless people locally — but lacking the Chinese to do the research himself, David asked some friends for help.

His curiosity and passion for helping people took him on a journey that eventually resulted in the founding of the New Start Center in 2008. With the support of a local chamber of commerce, David was able to offer homeless people somewhere to get a hot meal, have a shower, do some laundry, and even pick up new clothes if needed.

He says it was seeing the plight of young men living on the streets that really motivated him to start the center.

"Looking at these guys, I'd think they're great and have so much life potential," he says.

Currently, the center is open three times a week, with one day reserved solely for women – although most who visit are men. Over the years there has been the occasional unaccompanied minor.

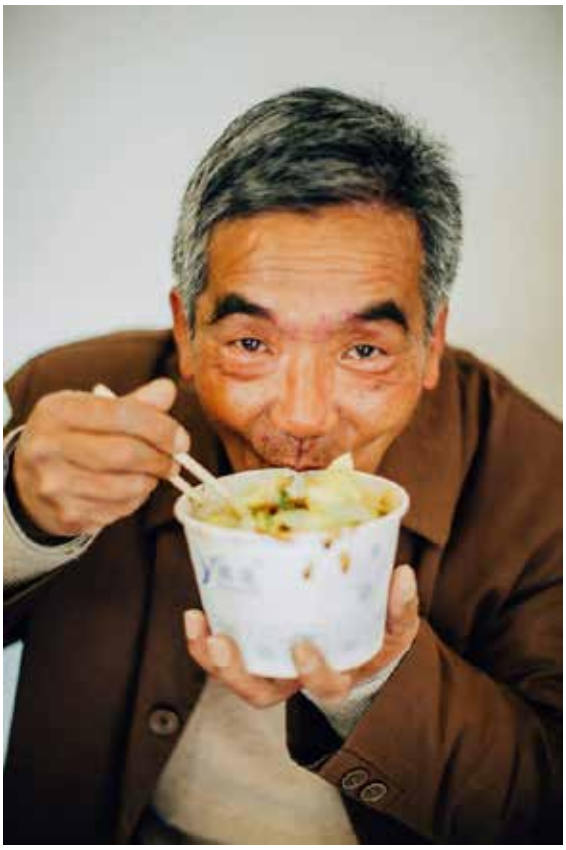

Photo provided to CDB

Homelessness is complex and the reasons for living on the streets vary enormously, but there are some clear trends among those who use the center.

"Generally they'll be from a poor family; maybe mum or dad passed away, or perhaps both. Or maybe there was a difficult divorce. Children may have been passed around to different family members. Not feeling safe at home is definitely a common thread."

Most of the center's users are literate, although few have had anything more than an elementary education. Generally they were born in small towns and villages, although there are also users from big cities.

"For most, it is not simply an economic situation," explains David. "And in China these days, it is perfectly possible to find a job."

The reasons for living on the streets often run much deeper.

"There's definitely some who have been jaded by bad

experiences … abusive owners and managers of factories, noodle shops. Small businesses that were kind of taking advantage of them, and they've run away as a result."

It might seem that there is little to stop a homeless person in Shanghai from simply using the services provided at the drop-in center, cleaning themselves up and finding a new job. But it is often not that simple.

"Typically, someone on the street doesn't have the social or mental capacity to hold down a job," says David.

Luckily, his organization can offer additional support: a unique residential training program designed to provide people with the skills they need to get back on their feet, and ultimately into employment. Situated a few kilometers from the drop-in center, the 400-square-meter facility serves as a home for those deemed suitable for the New Start Center's training program and even boasts its own gym and garden.

"It's invitation-only basically," says David, explaining how people can join the program. "We want to make sure that if someone starts our training program we can get them through it and into a job. What we don't want is to create a state of dependency on us because it just isn't sustainable."

Identifying those who may be suitable to join the program starts at the drop-in center.

"The first step might be getting them involved as a volunteer. We might ask them for assistance with cleaning the center or doing laundry. There's always a lot of work to do. We might start to pay them a small stipend for their work," he explains.

But helping out at the drop-in center does not automatically lead to an invitation to join the residential program.

"Next we evaluate their work and see how they respond to feedback. We try to learn more about their family situation and ask them about any previous employment. We really try to understand why they're on the street."

If a person seems appropriate, they might be invited to visit the residential center as a guest, perhaps to join the other residents for a meal to see how they get on.

"We try to take it really slowly when it comes to allowing people into the residential center because we want to be confident that we're setting people up for success, not failure."

Once someone is accepted onto the program, they are assigned a trainer who acts as a mentor while they complete various tasks in the drop-in center.

"We take a very hands-on, individualized approach to training," says David. "And when someone's scheduled to be working, they're working six days a week from 8:30 am to 5:30 pm with a very clear set of responsibilities. Jobs might include helping prepare meals or even walking the center's dog. As we observe them, we learn where they need help. Generally we find that the people we work with lack soft skills, particularly around handling conflict and feedback."

Efforts to help those in the New Start Center's residential program develop the skills needed to lead normal lives do not stop at 5:30. Movie nights are sometimes held, with residents encouraged to take part in a discussion about the themes and issues raised. There are even regular sessions offered by an art therapist, giving participants the opportunity to express some of their fears and regrets in new and creative ways.

"One of our volunteers is very into the finance sector and comes in to talk to the residents about savings and compound interest," says David, the center's founder, revealing the comprehensive nature of the program.

While many who complete the residential program will work toward getting a job, others might simply work on being able to return home. Some who end up on the streets lack any kind of support network due to broken family relationships back home. This is something that the New Start Center tries to help with, facilitating reconciliation where possible. Occasionally, David or one of his two employees will even drive a person home.

If a homeless person agrees to return home, it can immediately improve their financial and living situation. By returning to the place where they have their hukou they can often qualify for various local welfare benefits.

But accessing any kind of government service, getting a job or a buying a SIM card usually requires a national ID

card, and that's something that many homeless people don't have.

"On any given day at our drop-in center, perhaps a third of the people there will not have an ID card. There's several reasons for this. They may simply have lost it; perhaps their wallet got stolen at some point on the streets," explains David.

And for some homeless people, getting a new one might involve more than time and money. Getting a new ID card often involves taking the family household registration document to the police. And this document is often back home with the homeless person's family.

"In a small town, they are likely to have a family member or someone they know working at the local police station. And for whatever reason, they feel ashamed to face their family," says David.

But not having an ID card is now a serious impediment to everyday life. The introduction of health QR codes during the pandemic, which require an ID number, has only made the possession of one more important.

"Sometimes their problems run much deeper than simply not having ID. They might not even know where their hukou is or perhaps don't actually know where their parents are. Their birth might never have been registered in the first place."

For those running homeless shelters in Western countries, addiction issues are often very common among those sleeping on the streets – something that inevitably has to be tackled if someone is to reintegrate back into society. It's something David and his team have also had to deal with.

"Alcohol and gambling are certainly a problem, and we've also had some men on harder substances that have cleaned up and completed our program. Although we don't offer any kind of recovery program, we do demand accountability from those who join our residency program. We've also had a couple of fights over the years, but things have been much calmer recently. Generally we are pretty good at identifying the sorts of people who might cause those kinds of problems," he says.

One of the center's residents poses for a photograph during a communal meal. (Photo provided to CDB).

For those who successfully make it through the residential program, the center can arrange paid employment with one of its partners.

"While our jobs program didn't get off to a good start, our partners are now very willing to take someone that we recommend. They know that someone who has been through our program is going to be an excellent worker. At the end of the day, companies want good employees – in good times and bad."

The center's main employment partner is a major chain restaurant serving Western cuisine, but it can also arrange work in a number of other businesses including a factory, depending on where a person's interests lie.

It's the sort of thing that the New Start Center excels at: providing long-term and sustainable solutions for people living on the streets.

"There are government shelters that do wonderful work; every major city has them. But they are mainly geared toward emergencies and helping people to return home – something that people aren't necessarily ready for. People on the streets have often left their families on awkward terms. Perhaps they've run off to the big city to make money, and when this plan fails they feel trapped. This is a vicious cycle that we try to break."

One thing the center has been unable to do is register officially as a social organization, limiting its ability to do any official fundraising. Currently, all the services it offers are funded through private donations and a handful of corporate partners.

"Informally, we've had very good cooperation with the government and have even had referrals off them for people they think could use our help."

Looking to the future, David hopes the center will be able to expand its services to other cities.

"We've also thought about business incubation for people participating in our program, but it's hard enough just keeping the doors open. So I don't have any huge expectations," he says.

"Seeing people's lives change and then starting families and having dignified jobs that they love – that's what keeps me going."

4

Shopping festivals and the environment: is China on the right track?

2021-08-30
Nicole Jin

Created by JD.com in 2003, the "6.18" Shopping Festival has since become a Chinese national phenomenon. While newer e-commerce platforms such as Kuaishou and Douyin are growing in popularity[1], Alibaba's Tmall and JD.com remain the top two players. The festival is the second-largest online sales event in China after "Double 11" and its total transactions hit 16.91 trillion yuan ($2.38 trillion) in 2020, up 42 percent from 2019[2].

This number is expected to see a significant increase this year, with both Tmall and JD.com starting pre-sale promotions on May 24. Pre-sale orders on the first day alone were up 640 percent, according to the JD Big Data Research Institute. Similarly, for Tmall, Li Jiaqi and Wei Ya — the top two livestreamers in China — had together sold products worth a total of 4.94 billion yuan as of midnight on May 25[3].

Figure 1, JD.com and Alibaba's Tmall both recorded record online sales during the 2020 "6.18" Shopping Festival. (Photo: Sina Finance)

But this extraordinary amount of economic activity generates a staggering amount of packaging waste. More than 16 million tonnes of waste came from parcels in China in 2020[4], with over 80 percent of that figure generated by e-commerce orders. Waste from express deliveries in 2018 was predominantly made up of cardboard boxes (44.03 percent) and plastic packaging (33.5 percent). The production, use and disposal of this quantity of packaging released 13.03 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, which could only be offset by planting 710 million trees[5].

However, the top source of carbon emissions from Chinese e-commerce is not packaging (18.04 percent), but logistics (29.16 percent), according to a 2021 report by Carbonstop. The study found that Chinese e-commerce firms together produce 53.26 million tonnes of carbon emissions every year, which accounts for 2.5 percent of the tertiary sector's total emissions and would require the planting of 10 billion trees to offset the environmental impact.

Environmental awareness has grown considerably across the industry in recent years and there is now a consensus on the need for greener operations[6]. To encourage the use of more environmentally-friendly packaging, the State Post Bureau promoted its "Green Packaging Standards in the Express Delivery Industry" in June 2020[7]. And the percentage of "slimmed" tape being used in packaging across China is now 83.8 percent; 65 percent of all e-commerce deliveries are no longer double packaged; 80.9 percent of transit bags are now recyclable; and 17,000 new delivery outlets have set up recycling bins for packaging waste. Nevertheless, Plastic Free China and Toxics-Free Corps — two Chinese NGOs committed to reducing pollution and waste — have stressed the need to define and regularly monitor more comprehensive and measurable green packaging outcomes as well as to increase the transparency of green initiatives[8]. For green logistics, the number of express delivery vehicles powered by renewable sources of energy increased steadily to exceed 30,000 in 2020 — a 45 percent increase from 2019[9].

Green transformations have been mostly state-led, but the role of NGOs in promoting green packaging was officially recognised by the State Post Bureau in the latest version of its "Green Packaging Standards in the Express Delivery Industry". Article 27 states that "Express delivery firms should strengthen cooperation with packaging production companies, scientific research institutions, universities and environmental protection organisations…". Article 28 requires postal and delivery enterprises to fully consider suggestions from customers, media and social organisations, in order to enhance the effectiveness of green packaging.

Plastic Free China said that it was delighted to see that this regulation gives environmental protection organizations

more room to directly and effectively influence green reforms of packaging in China[10]. Prior to this regulation, the work of Plastic Free China had predominantly involved conducting policy analyses and publishing research reports in collaboration with NGOs like WWF. Two months after the document on green packaging standards was published, Plastic Free China co-hosted an online forum titled "Post-Pandemic Plastic Pollution Governance", which was attended by more than 200 Chinese and international enterprises and institutions.

Despite the efforts of NGOs, the fact that there has been slow progress in green logistics overall is down to the cost, inconvenience, and level of technological maturity of new energy vehicles. New energy trucks are expensive one-time investments, while the government has continuously cut relevant subsidies for their marketization. Basic facilities such as charging piles and stations are also inadequate. In addition, new energy trucks are still not technically capable of long-distance travel.

Ren Haoxiang, vice-president of the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing, points to complicated index content, data access, and large differences between logistics companies as obstacles to quantifying the green development of the logistics industry[11]. This has severely hindered the government's policy planning and industry monitoring, resulting in enterprises not taking more rigorous approaches. A number of policies such as the "New Energy Development Plan" emphasise increasing public policy support for the use of new energy vehicles and the overall shift toward green logistics is accelerating[12]. From 2021, at least 80 percent of public transport and logistics vehicles in National Ecological Civilisation Pilot Zones and Air Pollution Prevention and Control Key Regions are required to be new energy vehicles.

China has announced that it will ensure its carbon emissions peak by 2030 and that it will achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. The two goals were proclaimed one of the country's eight major tasks for 2021 by President Xi Jinping in December 2020[13]. As the second-largest online sales event in China, how might this year's "6.18" Shopping Festival be different?

On May 20, JD.com declared "sustainable development" as one of the seven major trends of the annual "6.18" Shopping Festival. Not only has the company set this year's "6.18" carbon emissions target at 5 percent lower than that of 2020, it has also made it clear that it will further increase the deployment of new energy vehicles in several cities across the country. It will also leverage its technological capabilities to enhance real-time optimal route planning and storage network planning so as to reduce the number of in-transit vehicles. In addition, JD.com has promised to increase the number of recycling bins and reusable transit bags, and it will reduce the use of tape in the meantime. The internet retailer operates systematically with its subsidiary JD Logistics, which was named the second-greenest logistics enterprise by Plastic Free China in 2020[14].

Figure 2, JD.com announces its top 10 sustainable development partners on May 20. (Photo: IFeng Finance)

On the other hand, Alibaba has not announced any "6.18"-specific commitments aside from its carbon bill report, "Towards A Zero-Carbon Age", in April 2021[15]. A possible explanation is that Alibaba and JD.com both tend to make major announcements during the shopping festivals they have each established — "Double 11" in Alibaba's case. Cainiao, Alibaba's official delivery platform is believed to be lagging behind on making its business more sustainable[16]. This could hinder industry-wide green transformation efforts due to the firm's close collaboration with major courier businesses (STO Express, ZTO, YTO Express, BEST, Yunda Express and Deppon) and because of Alibaba's dominance of the e-commerce market. On a more positive note, Alibaba's other subsidiary Xianyu is where more than 1 billion items have been put up for resale every year since 2017. Alibaba's merger of Taobao and Xianyu attempts to encourage the reuse of items and to alter consumer behaviour — rather than the typical supplier-side approach, which echoes the concept of a circular economy.

Talk of a "circular economy" has become fashionable in recent years, and is celebrated as a comprehensive solution for solving the conflict between economic growth and the need to protect the environment. Based on ridding economic systems of waste and pollution, a circular economy maintains existing, rather than new resource investments by extending the service life of goods. Moving toward a circular economy requires shifts in both the responsibilities of producers and the behaviour of consumers in order to change economic systems where most products eventually become waste.

Whether a circular economy is the way forward is debatable, but so far this year's "6.18" Shopping Festival has not appeared to differ greatly from previous years. E-commerce platforms' current green initiatives are unlikely to sufficiently counterbalance the rise in carbon emissions from the huge projected increase in sales. That is not to say that the efforts made so far have been in vain, but it is perhaps the very nature of shopping festivals themselves that are the problem.

About the author:

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5

Tan Ting interview: China's first deaf lawyer on overcoming obstacles, helping others

2021-07-01
Isabella Jingwen Zhong

The law of a nation exists to protect the general rights and safety of its citizens, and lawyers are hired to advise and represent individuals in legal matters (American Bar Association, 2019[1]). But it is difficult for a country's laws to protect all of the people, all of the time –– and lawyers themselves are not necessarily able to defend all social groups.

Although the legal profession has become more representative of the communities it serves over time, marginalized groups still lack adequate representation in the profession, meaning that they often struggle to access representation from people who truly understand their backgrounds and circumstances. The deaf community is one of those groups.

In the United States, for example, there are just 250 deaf or hard of hearing people practising law, according to an August 2016 estimate (Washington Post, 2016[2]). In China, until very recently, there were none. But in 2021, Tan Ting, from Sichuan Province, passed the national judicial examination and became the first deaf lawyer in the country, with the news quickly going viral on social media. Her story has helped to draw attention to the limited access to legal services deaf people currently enjoy.

In May, CDB invited her to share her story and elaborate on what being the country's "first deaf lawyer" means to her and the wider deaf community.

Source: Tan Ting

Like many who lose their hearing, Tan Ting was not born deaf. "I was just like everyone else before. I could hear people speaking," she said, referring to the years prior to losing her hearing aged eight following a medical accident. Living in a mountain village in Southwestern China, Tan could not access special-needs education locally and quickly had to quit normal schooling, despite not having properly mastered standard Mandarin. "I still remember a sign telling us to speak Mandarin hanging in the village school."

She stayed at home for five years until her parents were told that in Xichang, a city situated five hours' drive from the family home, there was a primary school that accepted deaf children. There, for the first time, she was taught how to use sign language. While learning the language, Tan also tried to practise speaking as much as she could. Unable to hear how others pronounced words, she spoke according to the sound of every vowel and consonant in the pinyin system that she remembered from the school in her village. While Tan regularly practised speaking, talking and reading, it wasn't until voice transcription apps became available that she was able to check her pronunciation.

Tan Ting has always been determined to live as close to an ordinary life as possible, despite the inevitable difficulties. She attended school, learned to dance, participated in dancing competitions, took the gaokao (China's National College Entrance Exams) and was accepted into Chongqing Normal University. "Can deaf people go to university?" was a question asked by some of the teachers at the ordinary high school next to the "special school" that Tan attended. "We just can't hear," she would reply, "apart from that, we're just like everybody else."

First steps on a hard road

Tan Ting graduated in 2017 and quickly spotted a job advert from a local law firm that wanted to hire deaf staff to work as paralegals. She had read news reports about a lawyer at the firm named Tang Shuai, who used sign language to serve and represent the local deaf community. "I was very touched by what he was doing, so I was keen to get an interview," said Tan. She was hired and was soon working with Tang.

Tang was the only hearing lawyer working at the firm and possibly in the whole country who could use sign language, allowing him to easily and accurately communicate with deaf clients. He was well-known among the local deaf community and each day deaf clients would visit, asking for legal aid. A lot more would also send him text messages and Tang was overwhelmed by his workload. "He needs help, that is why he wants to hire someone from the

community," thought Tan.

Yet as time passed, she realised that the deaf staff at the firm meant something more than that. "He wanted us, as deaf people, to get involved in the legal profession not only to help deaf people, but also to help close the gap between the demand for legal services from the deaf community cross the country and the lawyers who could actually provide them," Tan reflected.

Source: Tan Ting

This realisation meant that joining the firm as a paralegal was only the first step on a challenging journey. The first part of Tan's job was to help hearing lawyers and deaf clients communicate with each other. But this soon exposed a problem: the sign language Tang Shuai used to communicate with deaf clients was not the standard Chinese (Mandarin) Sign Language (CSL) that Tan had learnt at school. Instead, Tang used a Natural Sign Language (NSL). The two are not completely in conflict, yet each has features distinct from the other. CSL is consistent with the grammar of spoken Mandarin, while NSL is more than a spoken language. Users of NSL use their hand as well as facial expressions and their body language to express themselves. For Tan, this meant learning the "new language" from scratch so that she could communicate with her new clients.

Communicating using messaging apps could also be problematic. Not all of the firm's clients knew Chinese characters or could write clearly. Messages would sometimes be a jumble of words and phrases, with several rounds of messaging required to piece together the required evidence and information.

When clients visited the office, they tended to be very emotional and agitated. They would repetitively describe their stories of being cheated, beaten, or mistreated, with Tan trying to follow their sign language as best she could –– experiences that have had a lasting impact on the Sichuan-born lawyer. "I wanted to do something for them," she said.

But her difficulties did not stop there. The task of collecting evidence from deaf clients and conveying it to her hearing colleagues was equally time-consuming and at times, frustrating. Without the benefit of a legal background, she had to learn everything from scratch. At first, the translated information she provided to qualified lawyers was often likely to be incomplete, meaning she would need to go back to the client and continue to enquire. When sufficient information was gathered, communication would continue to be slow as Tan would need to rely on a voice transcription app to talk with her hearing colleagues. One of her colleagues later reflected that when Tan first joined the firm, she often had to repeat a sentence two or three times so that people could understand her –– something that used to regularly upset Tan. "I have all the information needed, but I cannot tell them straightaway… deafness creates such a gap between the deaf and the hearing."

However, she never let anything get in her way and continued to move forward. The more she saw deaf clients coming and seeking legal help, the more she knew she was on the right path: serving the deaf community, a community that Tang Shuai said had seen its legal needs neglected.

Taking the next step

The longer Tan worked at the law firm, the stronger her enthusiasm for serving the deaf community became. However, as a paralegal without a legal background, she found it hard to deal with the most complicated cases –– the cases where deaf clients needed help the most. When these situations occurred, Tan had to ask for advice from qualified lawyers at the company, with replies occasionally taking days to come. Delays in providing advice could have serious consequences, with deaf clients sometimes becoming weary –– or even suicidal. Apart from providing comfort, there was little else Tan could do.

Her experience working as a paralegal helped her to realise that legal awareness among the deaf community is extremely poor, which sometimes led to deaf people breaking the law or falling victim to crime. Fraud and abuse are the most common types of crime that community

members are involved in, either as victims or perpetrators. In one case, a deaf person told a group of deaf people that if they lent him money to invest in his company, he would offer them jobs and pay them dividends. Many fell victim to the scam and used their savings or borrowed money to invest. After the "businessman" ran off with their money, it was Tan and her colleagues that they came to for help. But the group did not even know they were victims of fraud and had not kept documents or records to use as evidence. They simply wanted their money back.

Source: Tan Ting

In another case, a deaf client asked the lawyers to help get her a divorce from her violent husband. After suffering years of abuse she had already hired a divorce lawyer and filed a case with the court. Yet according to the client, the court refused to grant the divorce. However, when Tan and her colleagues read the court's decision, they were surprised to learn that it was the claimant who had withdrawn the case. It turned out that the woman knew nothing about the withdrawal and thought her divorce request had simply been rejected.

Why do deaf people become victims so easily? According to Tan, one of the main reasons is that they simply know too little about the law. "Some of them have no idea their actions have broken the law; others do not know how to protect their rights once they are violated." Another reason, she said, is that the needs of the community are often not met. "They often need money because it is not easy for them to find work. They also have other desires, such as wanting intimate relationships. Some people may take advantage of that and pretend that they would like to have a relationship, but really they are after their money."

Tan believes that education is the key and that outreach work is essential. "Deaf people need to learn about the law through sign language," she said. To educate herself, she decided to train as a lawyer.

Becoming a lawyer

A comprehensive legal training programme designed by Tang and other qualified lawyers for Tan and four other deaf paralegals was initiated in May 2018, with the first part of the training focusing on legal philosophy and methods. The programme was an eye-opening experience for the group, teaching them for the first time that the law is designed to protect the rights of both parties in a legal case. Before, Tan saw lawyers who represented criminals as "bad lawyers", but her training helped her to understand the value of every individual's legal rights.

The group of deaf paralegals, with no prior legal background, had to teach themselves subjects such as criminal law, tort law and contract law in their own time, using a series of textbooks provided for them. While some might have opted for online courses, Tan told CDB that she spent most of her time learning from books. "Many great open-access online courses did not have subtitles so I couldn't use them," she explained.

As a law student, Tan's daily routine started at 5am. While commuting to the firm, she would be reading through her textbooks and thinking through different cases. Once her office work was finished, Tan would resume her studying until late at night. Along with her colleagues, she took her first judicial examination after six months' study, but the whole group failed to pass. The initial failure shook people's faith and some of them decided to quit. Intellectually, studying law is extremely challenging –– especially while also trying to hold down a full-time job and balancing family and financial pressures. Some complained of being too old or needing to get married. During Tan's three years preparing for the exams, her law firm hired more than 30 paralegals, yet in the end, only Tan and two others stayed.

Occasionally, Tan would come to Tang Shuai's office and ask for advice on studying law. Recognising her hard work and dedication, Tang always provided her with encouragement. Sometimes, he even told Tan's husband to cheer her up when times were tough. "I was like an old father trying to take care of his children!" laughed Tang.

Source: Tan Ting

Tan's husband has always been her pillar of support. Born an ordinary boy, he lost his hearing due to a medical accident at the age of two and never learned to speak. After work, when Tan would study late into the evening in the office, her husband would stay and sit by her side. On their way home, he would keep his eye on the stops while Tan read her textbooks, making sure they didn't miss their station.

Tan's mother was another family member whose support for her was unconditional. However, before Tan had completed her exams, she was diagnosed with advanced cancer, something that came as a complete shock to her daughter. Staying by her mother's hospital bedside, for the first time, Tan seriously considered giving up. But her mother wouldn't hear of it: "You must attend the exam," she said in a text message. "You should live for yourself and society. Do things to help those who are living at the bottom and suffering."

When the results of 2021's national judicial exams were released and Tan passed, she told her mother at once. "Be a good lawyer," said her mother, "and take care of yourself."

Source: Tan Ting

China's first deaf lawyer

"How can deaf people become lawyers? How can they go to court and represent someone?" were the questions that regularly greeted Tan Ting. "It's better to think about solutions rather than linger on these questions," she would reply, feeling confident that in the future, more deaf and hard of hearing people would join the legal profession.

People's general understanding of the legal profession tends to be concentrated on court proceedings. In reality, lawyers do much more than going to court and arguing their clients' cases. Now qualified, Tan thinks she is able to deal with cases more smoothly with other hearing lawyers in her team, and subsequently, help more deaf people who are in need of legal counsel.

The first full case she was involved with after qualifying was an alleged rape. On 30 March, Tan received a video call from a young, deaf girl. She said that she had been raped, but had not reported her attacker to the police immediately after the incident. The rapist had threatened that both of them would be jailed if the case was reported. The girl could not talk to her family about what had happened due to feelings of shame and problems communicating, with her family not able to use sign language well. Not until the girl gave birth to a child, did her family realise what had happened. The girl's brother went to the police, but she refused to say anything about the incident.

While the girl wasn't willing to open up to the police, she did feel comfortable enough to tell Tan during their video call. However, by then, the best time to collect evidence had long passed, meaning that a conviction would be impossible. "There are a large number of cases like this," Tan said, "no one has told young deaf girls what to do to protect their own rights when they are the victim of a sexual assault."

In the past, Tan made a couple of videos to help the community better understand the law. However, very few people watched them. "In my opinion, the key to reaching out is through sign language." Among China's approximately 30 million deaf citizens, most still prefer to use natural sign language, yet the majority of the legal education videos targeted at the community are not produced in natural sign language. Even the sign language that's often provided for television press conferences is

usually not a natural sign language. And that isn't the only problem. According to Tan, most deaf people will not look at the interpreter: "the person is usually too small on the screen and our eyes soon get tired," she explained.

"In order to raise legal awareness, the legal interpreter must also have a clear understanding of the average deaf person's comprehension ability and way of thinking, in order to produce videos that can effectively help them understand the law." But Tan doesn't think everything can be provided online, and is keen for regular offline talks and lectures to be held, targeted at the deaf community.

Source: Tan Ting

Since she became China's first deaf lawyer, her story has received plenty of media attention. But the attention hasn't changed her daily routine of meeting deaf clients at the office and helping them navigate the law. Many also contact her and the team online, and she continues to use sign language and transcription apps to communicate and provide as much advice as she can. To deaf people who come to see her, she is often viewed as much more than a lawyer, with some asking for advice on other aspects of their lives. Sadly, members of the community often have few places to turn. "One time, a lady asked me to help her and her partner get married," Tan recalled, "I told her that if they were both willing to get married, they should go to the Ministry of Civil Affairs with the required documents. Lawyers cannot help with that!"

Tan's high profile has kept her busy, as both clients and the media constantly seek her out. But fame is a double-edged sword: while most have praised her work, some have made negative comments. Tang Shuai, Tan's trainer and mentor, has been asked if he encouraged Tan to be a lawyer to generate publicity for his business. While finding the questions upsetting, Tang has repeatedly stressed the urgent need of the deaf community to be able to access proper legal services.

"The emergence of lawyers like Tan Ting is inevitable as a society develops. Now we have the first deaf lawyer, in the future, we will have deaf judges, deaf prosecutors, or even courtrooms specially designed to deal with cases involving deaf people. Until that time, communication problems (between the deaf and the hearing) in the legal field can be tackled gradually, easing the isolation of the deaf community."

Tan is optimistic about the future, both for her community and her career. But for now, she does not want to be too ambitious. When asked if she would represent clients in court, she said she had not thought of representing anyone yet. "I want to continue focusing on raising legal awareness among deaf people; it is an important mission."

Despite all her success, Tan is still constantly looking for ways to improve her own skills and abilities. She continues practicing her speaking as she needs to communicate with hearing colleagues and sometimes has to give legal counsel to hearing clients. For now, she mostly uses an app developed by a company named Xunfei which is able to transcribe what hearing clients say, and she will sometimes turn to pen and paper. "I want to learn lip reading, so understanding and talking to hearing clients will become easier." And her profession also ensures that she continues to learn new things, something she says makes her feel "safe, connected and content."

Compared to many in the deaf community, Tan Ting has enjoyed great success. Yet growing up, like many others who were not born deaf, she has gone through a long, tough process to accept her disability. "People threw strange looks at me and it made me feel terrible. It made me think I really was a strange person." Leaving home for school and work has made her realise that there are many people in the country that are just like her, and the majority of them have unfulfilled needs. Having qualified as a lawyer, she is now able to help people using her professional skills and believes that so much more can be done to get China's deaf population more involved and better connected. "I hope that more accessible facilities and environments will be set up for the deaf community, and that many training programmes will be made available to hearing people who

would like to learn sign languages and later serve the deaf community in different sectors."

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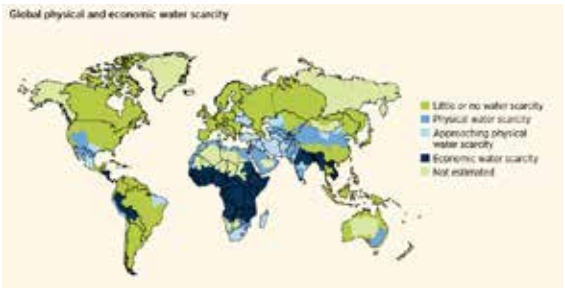
6

Government, NGOs work to ease China's water problems

2021-07-21
Shicheng Shao

On April 13, Japan announced its decision to release treated wastewater from the destroyed Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant into the ocean, following the tsunami which caused the meltdown of three nuclear reactors in March 2011. Since then, over 1.25 million tons of cooling water have been used to keep the reactor cores from melting. While the world is focused on the environmental impact of Japan's decision, it is important to remember just how much people rely on access to clean water every day.

The sixth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal sets out to ensure the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Water scarcity affects more than 40 percent of the global population,[1] a problem that is being exacerbated by rising global temperatures and polluted water from human activity. Contaminated water can transmit diseases such as diarrhea, cholera, and dysentery, causing approximately 485,000 diarrheal deaths per year.[2] It is estimated that by 2025, half of the world's population will be living in water-stressed areas.[3]

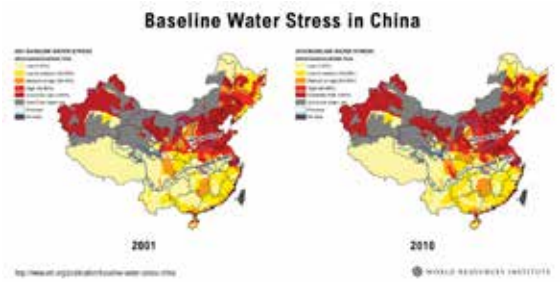


Source: United Nations

Water scarcity also has a negative impact on food production. Without water, farmers cannot grow their crops or feed their livestock, contributing to food insecurity. The lack of adequate food and water hinders social and economic progress, especially in less-developed countries. Therefore, universal access to safe and affordable drinking water by 2030 is an essential goal that every country must strive to achieve. Doing so requires substantial investments in renewing outdated infrastructure, building sanitation facilities, and increasing public awareness of water scarcity. China is committed to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and both its government and civil society efforts have been directed to that end.

With nearly one-fifth of the world's population and only about 6 percent of global renewable freshwater resources,[4] water scarcity has been a long-term challenge for the country. Access to safe drinking water in China has greatly improved over the past few decades. The country's development drive and rural-to-urban migration have improved living standards and expanded water access, yet millions still live without easy access to safe and clean water.

China's water resources are not only scarce, but also hugely impacted by pollution. High economic growth followed by rapid industrialization and urbanization have increased both demand for clean water and water pollution. Between 2000 and 2015, China's total water use increased by 8.8 percent and wastewater emissions grew by more than 50 percent.[5] Moreover, around 8.3 percent of China's water is too polluted for use in the agricultural and industrial sectors.[6] Water shortages and pollution have affected major cities nationwide. For example, the 112 million residents of Beijing, Tianjin, and the surrounding province of Hebei manage their daily lives with less than the per capita annual water consumption of Saudi Arabia.[7]



Source: World Resources Institute

In response to the shortage of clean water, in 2015, China's State Council issued the Water Pollution Prevention and Control Action Plan to improve water quality and manage water resources. In 2017, the National People's Congress revised the related Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law. The revised law requires the provision of emergency and back-up water resources in cities that rely on a single source of water, more transparent information on drinking water quality, construction of sewage treatment and garbage disposal facilities in rural areas, and a "river chief" system with leading officials taking responsibility for tackling water pollution.[8] Drinking water suppliers can now be fined when they fail to meet the required standards, and government officials are rewarded or sanctioned according to their performance.

Another obstacle to providing China's 1.4 billion people with access to clean and safe water is the uneven distribution of freshwater resources. Roughly half of the country's population is concentrated in its 15 northern provinces and municipalities, where only one-fifth of freshwater resources are located.[9] Policy responses in China have focused on diverting freshwater from the south to the north under the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, an effort that has been ongoing since construction began in 2002. Policymakers have also set ambitious water management standards and enhanced water conservation efforts to control water usage. The "Three Red Lines" issued by the State Council in 2021 set out country-wide water management objectives including limiting national water consumption to 700 billion cubic meters per year, increasing industrial water usage efficiency, and ensuring that more major water sources meet national water quality standards by 2030.[10] In 2015, China launched the "sponge city" initiative that ordered 30 cities to collect and re-use a required amount of rainfall by 2030.[11] Stringent measures to tackle water pollution and water scarcity in China have impacted hundreds of millions of lives, bringing the country closer to its sustainable development targets for 2030.

Source: Obermeyer

Alongside the Chinese government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country have contributed to the fight against water scarcity and unhygienic practices with their own projects. A lack of knowledge about water conservation and sanitation leads to unsustainable practices that not only waste water, but also endanger public health. This is an especially severe problem for children living in rural areas who are less aware of the environmental issue. In a bid to tackle this, domestic NGOs in China have launched campaigns to raise public awareness of the importance of water and hygiene.

One such organization, the China Environmental Protection Foundation (CEPF), has partnered with various companies on a series of projects related to safe drinking water. For example, its "Green Mountains and Clear Waters" project with Ping An Insurance has installed water purification systems in 10 primary schools and provided more than 2,500 students and teachers with filtered drinking water.[12] Other initiatives include the "Streams Action – Honeywell Safe Drinking Classroom" project, which has set up special safe drinking classrooms to supply hot and cold drinking water to schoolchildren in rural China, while also carrying out related education activities[13]. Similarly, the TOTO Water Environment Fund aims to disseminate knowledge and cultivate social awareness of environmental protection and water conservation through public campaigns.[14] In 2021, the CEPF plans to host water education and training programs centered on the theme of protecting the Yangtze River. These programs aim to train environmental activists at universities, as well as workers in social organizations. The project, funded by TOTO, will reach 19 provinces and cities in the Yangtze River Basin.

Source: CEPF

People tend to take access to clean water and sanitation for granted, but it is a privilege that many people in the world do not have. Events like Japan's decision to release radioactive wastewater into the ocean remind us of our privilege and reliance on clean water in our everyday lives. The Chinese government has concentrated policy efforts on the battle against water scarcity and water pollution, with notable achievements over the past few decades. Chinese NGOs, such as the CEPF, have designed their projects to complement the government's national agenda. Going forward, domestic NGOs can benefit from integrating their projects with government initiatives for wider impact, increasing their presence on social media and online

platforms to reach a broader audience, and conducting public campaigns on water conservation and hygiene in urban areas to replicate the success they have had in rural areas. As citizens, we must also do our part to reduce water usage and limit pollution, while China gradually moves toward the development goal of ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. From turning off the tap when we brush our teeth to the proper disposal of wastewater, every drop matters.

Source: CEPF

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7

Seeing change in the countryside: Yang Jin on glasses for kids

2021-09-30
Isabella Jingwen Zhong

"We say education changes rural children's lives; but how can their lives be changed by education if they cannot even see the blackboard clearly?" Yang Jin asked during a recent interview with CDB.

As the secretary-general of Education in Sight, an organization that aims to provide free glasses to students from deprived backgrounds, Yang has been trying to answer her own question.

Yang Jin with students at a local school in Yunnan. Source: Yang Jin

Growing up in a little town named Longling in Yunnan Province, near the border with Myanmar, Yang believes her life was changed by a pair of glasses. When she was in Grade Four in primary school, she was told by a teacher to see an optometrist due to problems with her vision. Yang's father took her on a three-day journey to the provincial capital Kunming to get her very first pair of glasses; they felt strange, heavy, and the lenses were as thick as a beer bottle, yet from the moment she first tried them on, the whole world started to look clearer. Finally, Yang was able to see the blackboard clearly at school.

Later, after finishing high school, she left her hometown for university. She eventually settled in Beijing and went to work in the corporate sector, living a very different life to many of her peers back in Yunnan.

In the two decades since Yang got her first pair of glasses, Longling has undergone significant change. It has better roads and facilities, although there are still few bus routes serving the city. Most people in villages continue to use motorbikes or tractors to transport people and goods. The city still does not have any ophthalmology hospitals. The handful of opticians in the area cannot meet local demand and they are often unaffordable for local residents.

Many children in rural Yunnan live with their grandparents while their parents work in far-away cities. Often, members of the older generation don't understand the importance of wearing corrective glasses, and those that do are forced to make long journeys to buy glasses for their grandchildren. Expectations that children will end up working as farmers often mean a child's eyesight is given a low priority.

Education in Sight was founded by Andrew Shirman and Sam Waldo, two American volunteer teachers who joined the Teach for China (TFC) program and taught in Yunnan Province for two years. During their time working in schools, the pair realized that students unable to afford glasses were a common problem, and this had a direct impact on their performance at school. Attempting to solve the issue, the pair set up Education in Sight in 2012 and raised funds to support its operations.

Yang's encounter with the organization was through Teach for China. After helping with one of TFC's programs in Yunnan, she started to seriously consider the possibility of leaving the corporate sector and working for a charity. Yang took the first step and joined TFC's Yunnan office in 2012. During her time with the organization, she heard about Education in Sight from colleagues and was impressed with the work Shirman and Waldo were doing.

"I had goosebumps when I first heard about it!" exclaimed Yang. "They are trying to solve an issue that has been largely ignored." When she finished working for TFC and decided to move back to Beijing, she learnt that Education in Sight was undergoing some internal changes and urgently needed more full-time staff. "I went to see Sam Waldo and realised there was a lot that needed doing there. Also, I knew I could relate to the work because I have suffered from myopia for years, and I totally understand what glasses mean to people like myself," she said. Shortly after her meeting with the American, Yang joined Education in Sight as its second full-time member of staff.

So far, most of the organization's programs have taken place in rural Yunnan, covering 1,055 schools in 10 counties and providing children with a total of 409,313 check-ups in nine newly opened vision centers. It has so far distributed 54,559 pairs of glasses. Choosing Yunnan as their main

area of operations isn't just because of the connections Shirman, Waldo and Yang have to the area. The situation in the province is similar to other less-developed regions of China. Yang said that after the huge national poverty alleviation program, facilities in the area have improved. "In the past, you could see dilapidated buildings used as students' classrooms and dormitories, but now, the local school is often the best building in the village," she said.

A student trying a pair of glasses. Source: Yang Jin

While changes on the outside are indeed impressive, people's attitudes can still be a problem. The actual gap between rural and urban areas is still huge. For example, when children in urban cities have vision problems, it is very natural for parents to take them to a hospital or an optician for regular check-ups. Afterwards, children will be given glasses to wear or receive other treatments. But in rural areas children sometimes do not even know how to read an eye chart. "I remember once we went to a village school. We noticed that most of the children reacted rather slowly to the eye chart and at first, we thought all of them had poor vision. But later, we realised that they simply didn't know how to read the eye chart – they had never seen one before!"

Some may question the causes of vision problems in rural areas, as people might assume that children do not spend as much time on phones and computer games as their urban counterparts. Yang told CDB that there are three main reasons that lead to poor vision in rural children.

"Some were born with eye disorders and diseases related to their genes. This is a very unfortunate group because many of them may not be able to receive timely or sufficient treatment due to the high cost and time required," she explained. "The second reason is quite similar to children in cities: they spend too much time staring at their phones. Without proper guidance and discipline and quality time spent with family or friends, children end up spending all their spare time on their phones, which can significantly harm a person's vision." The third reason relates to everyday habits. "No one has told the children how to use their eyes safely, so they are left to do things their own way. Some of the children I met at our program told me that they do not do their homework in a dark room, instead they do it in the sun because the light is very bright."

Shocking as these situations are, Yang continues to see progress in the villages, and that is what keeps her going despite the difficult conditions both within the organization and in the field. For a long time, Shirman and Yang were the only full-time staff at Education in Sight. This meant that Yang had to juggle multiple roles, from program designer and assessment officer in the office, to program officer in the field, as well as serving as secretary-general when talking to potential donors. Labor is one problem, and funding is another big concern. There have been times when Yang has had to pay the organization's bills out of her own pocket.

Before a new program is launched, there are numerous procedures that Yang has to go through with several departments of the local government, in addition to communicating with local schools, communities, hospitals, opticians and individuals. Misunderstandings can easily arise and lead to disagreement, and it is not an easy job to keep all the various stakeholders satisfied.

An optician is doing check-ups for a student. Source: Yang Jin

As someone who has changed careers, Yang admitted that charity work is more complicated than working in the private sector. "We are not making profits through our work at Education in Sight," she said. "Our one and only objective is to help students with vision problems. This may sound like a simple task, but we have encountered obstacles from all sides. And the infrastructure of the charity sector has not been supportive, either."

But all her hard work has not been in vain. Changes in behaviours and attitudes have gradually become apparent. "When we launch a new program in a local school, during the first semester many parents are likely to refuse to let their children wear glasses. But by the time of the second, third and fourth semesters, we start to see more and more parents happy to let their children wear glasses, with their sons and daughters becoming more outgoing and performing better at school. Parents who used to reject the program will even come to us and ask us to do check-ups on their children, and that's really exciting!" Yang told CDB.

The last couple of years have been difficult for Education in Sight. Andrew Shirman, one of the charity's founders, decided to leave for personal reasons and move back to the United States. In addition, the Covid-19 outbreak in late 2019 brought all the organization's programs to a halt. And even after the pandemic had peaked in China, fresh outbreaks in Yunnan Province during the past two summers interrupted work and the opening of new projects. An earthquake which struck Yangbi in May further disrupted one of its programs.

"I had thought 2020 would be a key year for Education in Sight," said Yang. "In terms of our field programs, we had already managed to connect with several towns in Yunnan and had signed contracts to provide services to them". But the closure of schools during the pandemic meant that the work had to cease. "Honestly speaking, there were times when I thought that the organization might not survive."

Yang Jin with a student in Yunnan. Source: Yang Jin

However, Education in Sight has survived and its programs have managed to run normally this year – not that its staff were idle during the pandemic. Some internal changes have taken place and the team has come up with a number of creative ideas.

"For the first time in our history, we have got six people in the office!" Yang proclaimed. "So this year we have been focusing on teambuilding and staff training. We have arranged courses on program management and professional optometry skills. Five of our staff are now able to work as opticians in the field."

In terms of programs, Education in Sight has had a few breakthroughs too. With going into schools not an option anymore, Yang and her team decided to concentrate on children and the elderly in urban communities. After applying for the charity's first government purchase service program, the organization was able to set up a small community center named "Love Eyes House" in a neighbourhood of Kunming's Airport Economic Development Zone, providing advice on eyecare and the importance of regular check-ups and organizing workshops to help both children and their parents understand how to look after their eyes and deal with vision problems.

"Sometimes, charities are put off from applying for service programs, as the process can be tedious. But we hope it can make our services known to the government, and help us to advocate for more attention to be paid to vision problems in children. We also would like the government to provide more support to organizations and programs focusing on this issue."

In addition to programs supported by government funding, Education in Sight has also applied to operate service programs run by other organizations aiming to help protect children's vision. Years of experience in rural Yunnan has enabled its staff to develop the charity's promotion materials, something they now help other organizations with. Education in Sight has also helped train workers from other charities, and has trained school staff, healthcare professionals and opticians in Yunnan for a while. In Yang's opinion, the charity can't hope to meet the huge demand for glasses, hence it is vital to educate both children and their parents or guardians and search for local partners. "We can provide a child with a pair of glasses for free, but after we leave, they will need to go for regular check-ups and change their glasses once every few years. So children have to get support from local organizations as well as their family members."

Yang Jin at an eyecare workshop. Source: Yang Jin

Yang's work over the past seven years has kept her very busy, but her level of engagement has given her a deep sense of what is required when running a charitable program. She feels that there is considerable crossover between the charity and private sectors and that many of the skills she picked up in business have proven useful in her current role. "Ideally, charitable organizations should be more productive and have better quality management teams. So it would be good to see more people from business backgrounds sharing their skills and experiences."

The consequences of poor management and human resources issues have harmed many charitable organizations – and staff turnover is often high. Attracting and retaining talent remains a real problem in the sector.

Currently, Education in Sight has the largest full-time team it has ever had – and the organization wants to keep it that way. "We sometimes invite consultants and experienced managers to give us training and recommendations on current programs and team development," said Yang. "The most important question is 'who are we serving?' It is common to have multiple stakeholders in one program, but we need to be clear who the key service recipients are throughout the program. In this area, charitable organizations have much to learn from the private sector."

However, when it comes to fundraising, there is less to learn from business. Raising money remains problematic for most Chinese charities, and Education in Sight is no exception. As an organization that is not eligible to raise public funds, it cannot collect money like a registered company. To meet its funding needs, it has to rely on donations from foundations or promote its programs under organizations that have permission to hold public fundraising events. But with more corporate foundations now running their own programs, donations are often channelled into those programs first. Events such as the 9/9 Charity Day are helpful, but Yang revealed that it has become more difficult in recent years for small organizations to receive funds from the initiative – something which she expects to change in the future. For now, the organization must rely on online donations and private companies for the bulk of its funding.

For Education in Sight, the lingering effects of the pandemic present the charity with an uncertain future.

"In the coming two or three years, we will continue providing children with free glasses. As most of our programs are in Yunnan, next year we hope to expand our services to neighboring provinces, perhaps even to suburban Beijing. Considering the services we provide, we will try to extend our support from correcting refractive errors to helping children with amblyopia, cataracts and strabismus, as well as arranging surgery for those who need it. We understand that this extension of services will require us to spend more time on different individual cases and so our team has to be more professional and efficient."

"I want to see the beautiful future clearly!" Source: Yang Jin

Meanwhile, the team at Education in Sight is keen to share their experiences and knowledge with others working in the sector. "There are many organizations working to help protect children's eyes in China. If they're interested in running eye protection programs and think our model can serve as a guide for them, we are more than happy to share what we have in the form of training, resources and discussions."

Yang believes that now is the time to work harder to promote the organization's programs and find other charities to help with its work, ideally through media coverage. "We need to find partners to help us ensure that vision problems in rural children are getting noticed and all children get the eyecare that they need."

8

The Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid

2021-09
Published by Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China, Ministry of Commerce of People's Republic of China

The Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid have been reviewed and approved by the China International Development Cooperation Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce. They are hereby promulgated and will come into force on October 1, 2021.

China International Development Cooperation Agency

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China

Ministry of Commerce of People's Republic of China

Order (No. 1, 2021)

Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid

The Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid have been reviewed and approved by the China International Development Cooperation Agency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Commerce. They are hereby promulgated and will come into force on October 1, 2021.

Luo Zhaohui, Chairman of the China International Development Cooperation Agency
Wang Yi, Minister of Foreign Affairs
Wang Wentao, Minister of Commerce
Aug 27, 2021

Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid

Chapter One General Provisions

Article 1 In order to strengthen strategic planning and overall coordination of foreign aid, standardize the management and enhance the effectiveness thereof, these Measures are formulated in accordance with relevant laws and administrative regulations.

Article 2 The term "foreign aid" , as used in these Measures, refers to the use of government funds for foreign aid to provide supportive activities to the recipients, including economic, technical, material, talented personnel, and management support.

Article 3 The recipients of foreign aid mainly include developing countries that have already established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China and that are in need of aid; and international organizations with the majority of members being developing countries. In case of emergency or under special circumstances such as humanitarian assistance, developed countries or developing countries that have not established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China can also be recipients of China's aid.

Article 4 Foreign aid shall be committed to helping recipients alleviate and eliminate poverty, improving their livelihoods and ecological environment, promoting their economic development and social progress, strengthening their capabilities to achieve independent sustainable development, and consolidating and developing friendly and cooperative relations with recipients, so as to promote the joint construction of a high-quality Belt and Road Initiative, to enhance the construction of a new form of international relations and a community with a shared future for mankind.

Article 5 Foreign aid shall adhere to principles of justice, selflessness, authenticity, sincerity, mutual respect, equality, and win-win cooperation; respect the sovereignty of recipient countries, not interfere in their internal affairs, and not attach any political conditions; foreign aid should not exceed one's abilities; and policies should be implemented according to a country's needs and following negotiations, with a focus on delivering results.

Article 6 China International Development Cooperation Agency (hereinafter referred to as "CIDCA") is responsible for formulating foreign aid guidelines and policies, promoting the reform of foreign aid methods, centralizing the management of the scale and usage of foreign aid funds, compiling annual budgets and final accounts for foreign aid projects, deciding foreign aid projects, supervising and evaluating the implementation of foreign aid projects, and carrying out international foreign aid exchanges and cooperation.

The Ministry of Commerce and other foreign aid implementing departments (hereinafter referred to as "the aid implementing departments") are responsible for making foreign aid-related suggestions based on the needs of foreign work, undertaking concrete implementation work, negotiating with the recipients and handling specific matters concerning the implementation of foreign aid projects, organizing and managing projects, selecting the entities to implement foreign aid projects or dispatch foreign aid personnel, and managing foreign aid funds of the department.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for proposing foreign aid work according to the needs of diplomatic affairs. Chinese embassies and consulates (or missions) shall coordinate and manage the foreign aid work in their host countries (or international organizations), assist in foreign aid-related matters, communicate with the recipients about their aid needs and conduct policy reviews, and be responsible for the on-the-ground supervision and administration of the implementation of foreign aid projects.

Article 7 CIDCA shall, in conjunction with relevant departments, establish an interdepartmental coordination mechanism in order to coordinate major foreign aid issues.

Article 8 CIDCA shall establish a unified foreign aid logo for the Chinese government, and be responsible for the supervision and administration of the use of this logo.

Chapter Two: Foreign Aid Policy Planning

Article 9 CIDCA shall, in conjunction with relevant departments, formulate strategic guidelines and medium- and long-term policy plans for foreign aid, which shall be implemented upon approval in accordance with procedures.

Article 10 CIDCA shall, in conjunction with relevant departments, formulate country-specific foreign aid policies, which shall be implemented upon approval in accordance with procedures.

Article 11 CIDCA shall, in conjunction with relevant departments, formulate overall strategies and annual plans for foreign aid, which shall be implemented upon approval in accordance with procedures.

Article 12 CIDCA shall, in conjunction with relevant departments, conduct research on measures for the reform of foreign aid methods, and drive the practical implementation of those reform measures.

Article 13 CIDCA shall take the lead in advancing the legalization of foreign aid, and formulate corresponding management systems together with the aid implementing departments in accordance with the division of responsibilities.

Article 14 CIDCA shall establish a system for reserving foreign aid projects, to collect, review and determine foreign aid reserve projects in specific countries, and implement dynamic management of those reserve projects.

Foreign aid reserve projects are the main basis for the compiling of foreign aid fund plans and budgets, as well as the initiation of foreign aid projects.

Article 15 CIDCA shall draw up draft agreements of foreign aid details, negotiate with the recipients, and sign agreements in the name of the Chinese government.

Chapter Three: Methods of Foreign Aid

Article 16 Foreign aid funds mainly include three types: grants, interest-free loans and concessional loans.

Grants shall mainly be used to meet the recipients' needs in areas such as poverty alleviation, disaster reduction, people's livelihoods, social welfare, public services, and humanitarian aid.

Interest-free loans shall mainly be used to meet the recipients' needs in areas such as public infrastructure, and industrial and agricultural production.

Concessional loans shall mainly be used to support the recipients in areas such as projects with economic benefits, resource and energy development projects, and large-scale infrastructure construction projects.

Article 17 CIDCA shall innovate foreign aid forms through methods such as the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund.

Article 18 Foreign aid shall be carried out mainly in the form of project aid.

In case of emergency or under special circumstances such as humanitarian assistance, cash payments to aid recipients shall be permitted.

Article 19 Foreign aid projects mainly include the following types:

(1) Complete sets of projects: by organizing and guiding the whole or partial process of construction, installation and trial production, China provides the recipients with complete sets of equipment and project facilities in areas such as production and living, and public services; and provides long-term quality assurance and supporting technical services;

(2) Goods and material projects: providing the recipients with general materials for production and living, technical products or single-item equipment, and undertaking necessary supporting technical services;

(3) Technical assistance projects: comprehensively employing such methods as dispatching experts and technicians, or providing policy and technical consultants and equipment to assist recipients in reaching certain policy, management or technical goals;

(4) Human resource development cooperation projects: providing personnel from the recipient countries or organizations with various forms of academic degree education, advanced studies and training, personnel exchanges and senior expert services;

(5) Volunteer service projects: selecting volunteers to engage in public welfare services in recipient countries or organizations;

(6) Medical team projects: dispatching healthcare staff, providing part of the medical equipment and medicines free of charge, and providing fixed-point or itinerant medical services in recipient countries or organizations;

(7) Emergent humanitarian assistance projects: providing emergency relief materials, transferring cash, or dispatching rescue personnel when any country concerned suffers from humanitarian disasters;

(8) The South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund Projects: using the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund to support projects implemented by, for example, international organizations, social organizations, and think tanks.

Article 20 Foreign aid projects shall generally be implemented through intergovernmental assistance, which are mainly in the following forms:

(1) China bears responsibility for implementation;

(2) Joint cooperative implementation by China and the aid recipient based on agreed division of responsibilities;

(3) Independent implementation by the aid recipient under China's external supervision;

(4) Cooperative implementation by China, other countries, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations.

Article 21 Relevant regulations shall be formulated separately to strengthen the management of foreign aid funds and foreign aid concessional loans.

Chapter Four: Initiation of Foreign Aid Projects

Article 22 When any recipient calls for aid, it shall submit a project proposal to China through the Chinese embassy or consulate (mission). The embassy or consulate (mission) shall conduct a country-specific policy review of the proposal, and report clear opinions to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the CIDCA, and send an identical copy to all aid implementing departments at the same time.

The aid implementing departments can make project proposals to the CIDCA in accordance with their work requirements.

Article 23 A feasibility study shall be conducted before any foreign aid project is initiated.

China can request the recipient to provide materials related to the project to be initiated, as a prerequisite for the feasibility study.

Article 24 The CIDCA shall organize preliminary demonstration of any project. Projects shall be determined based on the results of a feasibility study, and approved to be initiated in accordance with procedures.

Article 25 After a foreign aid project is initiated, the CIDCA shall generally negotiate with the recipient to sign an intergovernmental agreement, with the rights and obligations of both parties stipulated, which mainly include the content of the project, funding arrangements, supporting conditions for project implementation, relevant tax reduction and exemption policies, and safety and security guarantees.

Article 26 Should major adjustments to the project's initiation agreement be made during the implementation of the project, the CIDCA can make corresponding adjustments and sign a supplementary agreement with the recipient after submitting for approval in accordance with procedures.

The aid implementing departments can submit adjustment suggestions to the CIDCA.

Article 27 For foreign aid projects co-implemented by China and other countries, international organizations, or non-governmental organizations, the CIDCA shall generally negotiate and sign cooperation agreements with the partners to clarify the rights and obligations of each party.

Article 28 For foreign aid projects supported by concessional loans, the decision as to whether to approve initiating the project shall be made by the CIDCA in accordance with procedures based on the assessments of the undertaking financial institution; a concessional loan framework agreement shall be signed with the recipient.

Article 29 In case of humanitarian disasters, the CIDCA shall work with relevant departments to formulate emergency assistance plans and go through project initiation procedures.

Chapter Five: Implementation Management of Foreign Aid

Article 30 The CIDCA shall, in accordance with the current division of responsibilities, make overall arrangements to guide the aid implementing departments to organize and implement projects.

The aid implementing departments shall organize and implement projects based on the approved content, and bear responsibilities for the projects' security, quality, progress, and investment control. Entrusting management

to relevant agencies or organizations shall be permitted.

Article 31 The CIDCA shall, in conjunction with relevant departments, promote the implementation of major projects, and solve any problems that may occur.

Article 32 The CIDCA and the Ministry of Commerce shall, in accordance with the division of responsibilities, manage the qualifications of the implementing entities of foreign aid projects, and formulate relevant management systems.

Article 33 For foreign aid projects implemented by the Chinese side, the aid implementing departments shall select specific project implementing entities in accordance with relevant laws and regulations.

Article 34 Project implementing entities shall not transfer or illegally subcontract their tasks to others.

Article 35 For granted projects or projects supported by interest-free loans, the aid implementing departments shall generally negotiate with the recipient to sign a foreign aid project implementation agreement, with specific matters of implementation as well as the rights and obligations of both parties clearly stipulated.

Article 36 For granted projects or projects supported by interest-free loans, the aid implementing departments shall generally negotiate with the implementing entity to sign a foreign aid project implementation agreement, with specific matters of implementation as well as the rights and obligations of both parties clearly stipulated.

Article 37 When a foreign aid project cannot be implemented due to diplomacy, national security or international obligations reasons, or due to force majeure, the CIDCA can suspend or terminate the project after submitting for approval in accordance with procedures.

The aid implementing departments can submit suggestions to the CIDCA on suspending or terminating such projects.

Article 38 After the completion of a foreign aid project, the Chinese side shall generally go through the intergovernmental handover procedures with the recipient, and negotiate and sign the intergovernmental handover certificate.

Article 39 The CIDCA, the aid implementing departments, together with relevant departments, shall establish a port inspection and release mechanism for foreign aid exports.

Except for goods, technologies and services that are subject to the country's export controls, the export of foreign aid goods and materials shall not be included in quota and licensing administration.

Article 40 Foreign aid funds shall be used for designated purposes only, and be subject to separate accounting. No entity or individual shall misappropriate the funds.

Article 41 "Foreign aid personnel" refers to personnel designated by the government or the project implementing entities to carry out foreign aid missions. Foreign aid personnel shall enjoy benefits stipulated by the Chinese government during the project mission overseas. Foreign aid personnel shall abide by the laws and regulations of China and the recipient country, and respect their customs and traditions during the project mission.

The project implementing entities shall strengthen the management and supervision of foreign aid personnel, and ensure they enjoy appropriate working and living conditions and personal accidental insurance, in accordance with relevant regulations.

Foreign aid personnel who have made outstanding contributions during a project mission can be awarded by the CIDCA and the aid implementing departments in accordance with the law. Those who have sacrificed their lives during the mission can be reported to relevant departments by the CIDCA and the aid implementing departments to be granted the title of "martyrs".

Article 42 If any project implementing entity violates any laws or regulations, any entity or individual shall complain or report to the CIDCA and the aid implementing departments in accordance with the law.

Chapter Six: Supervision and Evaluation of Foreign Aid

Article 43 The CIDCA, in conjunction with aid implementing departments, shall establish a supervision system to supervise the implementation of foreign aid projects.

Article 44 The CIDCA, in conjunction with aid implementing departments, shall establish an evaluation system for the implementation of foreign aid projects, formulate evaluation standards, and conduct evaluation work.

Article 45 The CIDCA, in conjunction with the aid implementing departments, shall establish a credit rating system for the project implementing entities, and assess and manage the conduct of such entities during their missions in accordance with the division of responsibilities.

Article 46 The CIDCA, in conjunction with the aid

implementing departments, shall establish an information reporting system for foreign aid projects.

The aid implementing departments shall update processes of aid projects to the CIDCA and report any major issues related to quality, safety, progress, and investment control during project implementation.

The Chinese embassies and consulates (missions) to foreign countries shall report to the CIDCA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the aid implementing departments any major issues, if found, during the on-the-ground supervision of foreign aid projects, such as issues related to quality, safety, progress, and investment control.

Article 47 The CIDCA, in conjunction with the aid implementing departments, shall establish a statistical system for foreign aid in accordance with the law, and collect, aggregate and compile foreign aid statistical data.

All aid implementing departments, relevant departments of the provincial government, and relevant entities shall, in accordance with the foreign aid statistical system, regularly report statistical data and related information to the CIDCA.

Chapter Seven: Legal Responsibilities

Article 48 If an implementing entity of a foreign aid project commits any of the following acts, the CIDCA and the aid implementing departments shall issue a warning or criticism, and may concurrently impose a fine of up to 30,000 yuan ($4,650) and publicize the penalty decision in accordance with the law:

(1) Transferring or illegally subcontracting the tasks of the foreign aid project;

(2) Failing to fulfill or delaying the fulfillment of the obligations under the project implementation contract, which affects the normal implementation of the project and causes serious adverse effects;

(3) Misappropriating foreign aid funds;

(4) Failing to guarantee the working and living conditions of the foreign aid personnel in accordance with relevant regulations, or failing to provide personal accidental insurance for the personnel.

If any project implementing entity violates relevant laws or administrative regulations, it shall be subject to administrative penalties accordingly; where a crime is constituted, it shall be subject to criminal liability in accordance with the law.

Article 49 If any member of the CIDCA, the aid implementing departments, or the embassies and consulates (missions) in charge of foreign aid management commits any of the following transgressions, he/she shall be subject to the corresponding penalty according to the severity of the action; where a crime is committed, he/she shall be subject to criminal liability in accordance with the law.

(1) Taking advantage of one's position to extort profit, or illegally accepting money or property to seek benefits for others;

(2) Abusing power, neglecting duty, or malpractice for personal gain and favoritism, thus harming national interests;

(3) Leaking State secrets.

Chapter Eight: Supplementary Provisions

Article 50 Foreign military aid shall be implemented in accordance with the State's and the military's relevant regulations.

Article 51 These Measures shall come into force on October 1, 2021. The Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid (for Trial Implementation) (the Ministry of Commerce Order No. 5, 2014) shall be repealed at the same time.