

DRIVING PRIVATE SECTOR EFFORTS TO PROMOTE GENDER INCLUSIVITY IN CHINA

Despite recent progress in advancing economic justice, the world economy still suffers from a gender gap, and China is no exception. In 2020, female employees accounted for 43.5 per cent of the employed population in China,¹ yet they only comprise of just over a third of boards of directors and boards of supervisors of enterprises (34.9 per cent and 38.2 per cent respectively),² and only 9.7 per cent of board members in listed companies.³ The private sector is an important catalyst for sustainable and gender-inclusive development and economic growth and can advance the implementation of important, international commitments to gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A key priority for UN Women's WeEmpowerAsia Programme in China is to work with companies to promote a gender-inclusive business culture.

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN TARGETED INDUSTRIES

To promote gender equality in the information and communications technology (ICT) and textile industries, WeEmpowerAsia China partnered with the China Electronics Standardization Association (CESA) and the China Textile Information Center. These partnerships can potentially benefit at least 12,483 companies in these two industries by supporting companies to issue and implement gender-responsive policies, with 157 companies from across the two industries having

PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

In 2019, UN Women partnered with the European Union (EU) to implement the **WeEmpowerAsia programme** in China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam, with the aim of increasing the number of women who lead and participate in business to advance inclusive and sustainable growth.

signed the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) since 2019.

Through these partnerships, WeEmpowerAsia has supported the integration of gender into China's industrial-level guidance, in alignment with the WEPs. In the ICT industry, the updated Evaluation Index System on Social Responsibility Governance Level of Information and Communication Technology Industry (T/CESA 16003-2021) came into effect in April 2021 and included gender dimensions such as incorporating gender indicators in reporting and setting up prevention and response mechanisms on sexual harassment. In the textile industry, a WEPs implementation guideline document was developed under the framework of CSC9000T, China's first standardized management system of social responsibility.

Along with the revised industry guidance, this achievement was possible as the result of focused

¹ National Bureau of Statistics, 2021, Final Statistical Monitoring Report on the Implementation of China National Program for Women's Development (2011-2020)

² *ibid.*

³ World Economic Forum, 2020, Global Gender Gap Report

technical support, including 10 training sessions and knowledge sharing seminars, reaching more than 28,000 company representatives. WeEmpowerAsia China and its two partners provided one-on-one technical support to 20 companies.

Notable actions taken by companies include:

- A technology company added a zero-tolerance towards workplace violence and harassment section in its Employee Handbook.
- A FinTech company integrated the WEPs into its company strategy and formulated corporate gender equality goals and indicators.
- A consulting company has integrated the WEPs into its CSR advisory service, although it has yet to accompany this with clear policy guidance.

WEPs ACTIVATOR

In October 2020, WeEmpowerAsia launched its WEPs Activator, a 10-month capacity-building journey towards a gender-equal workplace for a small group of companies, via interactive trainings, peer learning, and individual mentoring. The following year, the Activator was launched in China.

Representatives from companies across China attended 20 hours of training, covering topics such as gender bias, gender-responsive procurement, gender-sensitive marketing, assessment, planning and reporting, along with two individual mentorship sessions for tailored support. As a result, 14 companies conducted gender assessments of their programmes and policies, set targets, and developed gender action plans.

As of September 2022, many of the participating companies have begun their journey towards greater gender equality via gender action plans. Of the 14 participating companies:

- 11 have signed the WEPs, with others in the process of signing;
- All companies have developed gender action plans and 10 have started to implement them; and
- 100 per cent of participants report that their awareness of gender issues has been built, and that this will have a direct impact on their work. These include employees across a range of departments, from human resources (HR) and marketing to public relations and CSR.

Albea Plastic Metallizing Technologies (Shanghai) Company Ltd, supplier of cosmetic packaging and participant in the WEPs Activator, saw a clear business case for gender equality. “Gender-related performance is part of the assessment standards for suppliers nowadays,” said Han Miao, the company’s HR manager. “Carrying out gender-related projects has significantly increased our sales, so we’ve really seen the benefits to business.” Albea joined the WEPs Activator so that it could be competitively equipped with knowledge and tools, and the programme helped them develop a detailed action plan to achieve gender balance in their leadership. The plan includes launching a flexible working scheme, revising the company’s promotion policy based on principles of non-discrimination and equal opportunity, and carrying out gender training for management. As of March 2022, a taskforce has been created and the company has analysed the ratio of men and women across key departments and positions, including management.

After participating in the WEPs Activator, Thoughtworks China, part of an international technology consultancy, has sought to eradicate harmful gender stereotypes in all of its communications and advertising content. “The training sessions were fantastic,” said Kang Ke, Head of Marketing. “What I’ve learned is a way of thinking, rather than just solving a problem.” Thoughtworks China added gender-sensitive provisions into its marketing policies right after the training – the first step in its action plan.

PILOTING GENDER SENSITIVE POLICIES IN SELECTED COMPANIES

WeEmpowerAsia China has reached more than 2,000 company representatives with other forms of development support on gender and the WEPs, working with the China International Cooperation Association of SMEs (CICASME), the EU Chamber of Commerce Nanjing Chapter and the Mulan Initiative, one of the largest networks of influential women entrepreneurs in China. This included one-on-one support by consultants to the organisation. Among the actions being taken as a result of this support, two companies have added gender-responsive procurement into their procurement policies. A sportswear company has developed a prohibition of gender discrimination and equal opportunity policy and a zero-tolerance policy towards all forms of violence, harassment, and sexual exploitation at work, as well as a marketing plan to ensure that no gender-based discrimination or stereotypes feature

in any of its communication materials, and a chemical company has introduced a 16-week paternity leave policy.

ENCOURAGING PRIVATE SECTOR GENDER CHAMPIONS

WeEmpowerAsia launched the Asia-Pacific WEPs Awards in 2020 as a way to recognize and encourage exemplary gender-responsive business practices. Now an annual feature, the Awards raise the visibility of the WEPs and give companies an opportunity to share best practices. Across two Awards cycles in 2020 and 2021, 134 applications were from China. The good practices and learnings by the 20 winners were shared with companies throughout China and internationally.

The programme has also helped the EU Chamber of Commerce Nanjing Chapter to enhance its work promoting gender equality, including jointly providing training to the Chamber's member companies, and adding a new WEPs-aligned category to their annual CSR awards – Excellence in Women Empowerment.

The WEPs Network: A dynamic expansion

Under the various partnerships in the WeEmpowerAsia programme, 291 companies have newly signed the CEO Statement of Support for the WEPs. By signing the WEPs, many CEOs from major companies have committed to taking steps to integrate gender in operations, including Yang Yuanqing, the Chairman and CEO of Lenovo Group Limited, who has committed to raising the ratio of women in executive roles to 27 per cent by 2025 and rolling out Global Inclusion Training in the company.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Since 2019, the WeEmpowerAsia programme in China has:

- Supported 291 companies to become WEPs signatories – bringing the total number to 331 as of June 2022;
- Integrated gender-responsive provisions into two important industry guidelines, with the potential to benefit over 12,000 companies;
- Supported 25 companies to integrate gender into their corporate policies and practices, with the potential to benefit more than 80,000 employees, including at least 40,000 women;
- Equipped 30,000 company representatives with gender knowledge;
- Produced one guideline on reporting gender within the CSR/ESG reporting framework;
- Contributed to establishing a partnership with IKEA. The project is expected to benefit at least 62,000 employees, including over 27,000 women, via new workplace policies addressing sexual harassment and unpaid care in selected companies.

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