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# China Country Brief

On gender equality and women's economic empowerment

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Final Report



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# Summary

China performs relatively well in global rankings on gender equality. The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap index for China in 2018 is 0.673 compared to 0.656 in 2006 (0=gender imparity, 1=gender parity) compared to a global average of 0.68. However, the pace of progress towards gender equality in recent years has slowed compared to other countries. Key areas where gender inequality persists are:

- While female labour force participation rates in China remain high, the ratio of female to male participation has declined. There is marked gender-based occupational segregation, with women concentrated in services, agriculture and informal work .
- The overall gender wage gap is 17.2 percent, much of which is unexplained after controlling for education and experience.
- Despite equality in law, in practice there is gender inequality in land ownership and customary law often denies rights of land ownership to women.
- The female to male share of unpaid care work has been estimated at between 2.36 and 2.67. Reasons include: a lack of affordable childcare and women caring for elderly parents and grandparents. The unequal burden is particularly pronounced in rural areas.
- The relaxing of the one child policy may be worsening gender discrimination in the workplace, and older women are withdrawing from the labour market to care for grandchildren.
- Gender-based violence in the workplace is common.

There are strong Constitutional and legal provisions for gender equality in China and a clear policy framework in the China National Program for Women's Development (CNPWD) (2011-2020), overseen by the National Working Committee on Children and Women (NWCCW) under the State council . However:

- The mandate of the NWCCW to make policy is unclear and enforcement of laws is weak;
- Persistent gender norms and stereotypes (e.g. of women as “dutiful wives”) limit the extent to which laws and policy frameworks are effectively implemented;
- Women’s civil society organisations are operating in an increasingly restricted space limiting the extent to which women can make claims.

## **Prosperity Fund key areas for addressing gender equality and women’s economic empowerment**

- **Rule of law for business:** Key areas to address include tackling discrimination among employers and creditors; workplace provision for paid paternity and maternity leave; building the capacity of women as managers and on Boards; strengthening property rights of women in both land and housing; and employers’ limited understanding of requirements under the Domestic Violence Act.
- **Financial Services and Digital Technology:** Significant Gender disparities remain in access to financial services than women suggesting a need for targeted measures. Microcredit targeting women has had some success as well as capacity building and awareness raising with senior managers in formal financial institutions.
- **Infrastructure:** A top priority for the Communist Party of China (CPC) with under-explored potential for promoting women’s economic empowerment, particularly in rural areas, e.g. through involving women in infrastructure planning, improving women’s mobility and providing employment opportunities.
- **Energy and Low-Carbon Economy:** In line with the national policy goal to “to advocate for women’s participation in energy conservation and low-carbon living, ” there are opportunities for promoting WEE through green energy investments, in collaboration with the private sector.

- Health: Despite relatively favourable health outcomes for women a major issue remains that the sex ratio at birth is skewed towards male births due to sex selection. Other health issues for women include higher suicide rates, particularly in rural areas, eating disorders, lack of access to Sexual Health and Reproductive Health Services for young unmarried people, hazardous occupations, particularly for women in the informal sector, and higher out-of-pocket health expenditure.
- Skills: Girls/women are either outperforming or equally performing to boys/men at all levels of education, but this is not necessarily translating into equal economic opportunities in the workplace. Initiatives must foster workplace environments that view women as equally capable, including as leaders and tackle occupational segregation.

## 1. Key gender gaps related to inclusive economic growth

In the 1960s and 1970s under the centrally planned economy, China had one of the highest female employment rates in the world ([Vanham 2018](#), [WEF 2018](#)). Childcare was provided by the State, and gender wage gaps were comparatively small ([Chen 2011](#), [Chi and Li 2014](#)). Mao Zedong proclaimed that “women hold up half the sky” to prove that women are a resource that ought to be deployed outside of the home into professional fields. Since undertaking market-orientated reform in the 1980s, continuous and rapid growth has brought many economic opportunities, dramatically reduced poverty and improved health and education, including for women. However, it has also widened the gap between rich and poor, urban and rural dwellers and men and women ([Liu 2011](#), [Jain-Chandra et al. 2018](#)). With the well-evidenced link between gender equality and economic growth ([Khayria 2015](#), [IMF 2016](#), [EIGE 2017](#)), and growth rates now slowing, the impetus to address these inequalities becomes apparent.

The World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap index for China in 2018 is 0.673 compared to 0.656 in 2006 (0=gender imparity, 1=gender parity) signifying a move in the direction of greater gender equality. China is performing well on technical and professional skills as well as on enrolment in tertiary education where the female to male enrolment ratio is in favour of women at 1.21 (WEF, 2018). Yet, the pace of progress towards gender equality in recent years has slowed such that China has dropped down the global ranking from 63 to 103 out of 149 countries in this period. In comparison, the overall Global Gender Gap index for East Asia and the Pacific is 0.683 and the world average is 0.68 ([WEF 2018](#)). Two key indicators responsible for China’s lower ranking are “political empowerment” and “health and survival”—specifically the skewed sex ratio in favour of boys ([EU 2017](#)).

In the economy, gender gaps which are persisting - and, in some cases, widening – pertain to women’s participation in the workforce, their lesser asset control and ownership and unequal burden of unpaid care work<sup>1</sup>.

Gender gaps in the workforce: While female labour force participation rates in China remain high at 63.73 percent of all women aged over 15, the ratio of female to male participation declined from 0.86 in 1991 to 0.81 in 2017 ([UNDP 2017](#), [World Bank 2019](#)). Gender-based occupational segregation is also evident in recent data. The majority of women work in services, and this share is increasing, while

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<sup>1</sup> Currently, censuses and other household surveys in China collect but do not report systematically on sex-disaggregated data, making it difficult to track gender gaps systematically.

there is a decreasing share of women engaged in manufacturing ([World Bank 2019](#)). A higher share of employed women (20.5 percent) than men (15.2 percent) work in agricultural employment, much of which is informal employment, suggesting a ‘feminisation’ of the agricultural labour force ([de Brauw et al. 2012](#), [Ye et al. 2016](#), [EU 2017](#)). [ILO \(2018\) p. 123](#) find that 24.5 percent of women working in the informal sector are in agriculture compared to only 5.7 percent of men. Those working in the informal labour market—in agriculture or otherwise—are more vulnerable, since they are not protected by the Labour Contract Law (see [Ramani et al. 2013](#)).

Gender wage gaps are also persistent and widening: using standard measures there is a wage gap of 17.2 percent of women’s pay compared to men’s pay, and using the factor-weighted gender pay gap it is estimated to be 20.8 percent ([ILO 2018](#)).<sup>2</sup> Of China’s rural-to-urban migrant workers, around a third are women and they earn around a third less than their male equivalents ([Song 2014](#)). Gender pay gaps are often skewed by those at the top of the income distribution, and with only 17.5 percent of firms having a female top manager this may partly explain this pay gap ([World Bank 2012](#)). Much of the gender pay gap is unexplained with women and men of similar education and experience ending up with different wage outcomes ([Dasgupta et al. 2015](#)).

Gender gaps in asset control and ownership: Despite equality in law, in practice (see section 3) there is gender inequality in land ownership and customary law often denies rights of land ownership to women ([EU 2017](#)). In 2011, Landesa with China Renmin University and Michigan State University surveyed land rights, among 1791 farmers in 17 provinces and found that only 17.1 percent of existing contracts and 38.2 percent of existing certificates include women’s names ([Landesa 2011](#)). Similarly, in a study of 3,500 households across seven provinces in China (Liaoning, Fujian, Jiangxi, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu and Hunan), in more than 95 percent of the sample households the man’s name alone appears on the certificate. Although female heads of household are more receptive than all heads of household to the idea of women signing the certificate, about one in six households headed by women still choose to put a man’s name on their certificate ([World Bank 2016](#)).

Time poverty and the unequal burden of unpaid care work: Women work overall longer hours than men because they carry out a much higher share of unpaid care work estimated to be between 2.36 and 2.67 times what men do ([World Economic Forum 2018](#), [UN Women 2018](#), [OECD 2019](#)). [Data from the latest Time Use Survey shows that](#) this unequal burden is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where the share is 3.33 compared to urban areas where it is 2.14 ([Time Use Survey 2008](#)). This corroborates with other studies. [Chen et al. \(2017\)](#) find that Chinese married women who provide more than 15-20 hours of caregiving per week are between 4.5 to 7.7 percent less likely to be in the labour force.<sup>3</sup> Rural women whose husbands migrate to the city for work particularly suffer from time poverty, being fully responsible for care of children and elderly family members, as well as agricultural production ([Chen 2009](#), [EU 2017](#)). There are widening gaps on time spent on housework with age: women spend more time on housework as they become older and men spend less time ([Luo and Chui, 2018](#)). With the moves towards a market-oriented economy, social provisions from the Maoist era were dismantled, and care responsibilities were returned to families ([Connolly et al. 2018](#)). Private childcare services have developed but are often unaffordable for low-income households.

China’s aging population has also increased the time burden on women who have elderly parents/parents-in-law ([Cook 2013](#)). Although China changed its one child policy in 2016, the ageing trend is unlikely to be reversed soon. In 2015, 15.2 percent of China’s population was over 60 years old, and it is projected that this proportion will rise to 36.5 percent in 2050 (UNDESA 2015 in [Li et al. 2019](#)). Children from single-child parents face what is known as the 4-2-1 phenomenon: when the child reaches working age, he or she may have to care for two parents and four grandparents in

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<sup>2</sup> The factor-weighted gender pay gap removes some of the major composition effects caused by the existence of clusters. For more information see [ILO 2018](#).

<sup>3</sup> This result was only statistically significant in rural areas.

retirement at the same time as possibly caring for one or two children ([Bailey et al. 2012](#)). Strong social norms frame obligations of children to meet their parents’ physical and emotional needs in old age, and in practice this obligation often falls onto women ([Branigan 2012](#)). Where this is excessively heavy it threatens women’s opportunities in the labour force as well as their well-being.

## 2. Enabling environment for gender equality<sup>4</sup> and WEE<sup>5</sup>

The Chinese Constitution Article 48 states that “Women in the People’s Republic of China enjoy equal rights with men in all spheres of life, in political, economic, cultural, social and family life. The state protects the rights and interests of women, applies the principle of equal pay for equal work to men and women alike and trains and selects cadres from among women.” This overarching framework has been transformed into a number of domestic laws (see Table 1 below) including a number related to economic rights. However, a number of gaps remain (see Section 4 in the “Rule of Law” below).

**Table 1: Key areas of domestic legislation related to gender equality and women’s rights**

Domestic legislation	Description
The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Rights and Interests of Women (1992)	Safeguards women's equal rights and interests in political, economic, cultural, social and family life.
Revised Marriage Law (2001)	This Law which is the fundamental code governing marriage and family relations was revised in 2001 to promote a more equitable system of property distribution for women at divorce and to address violence against women in the family.
Law on Land Contract in Rural Areas (2002)	Article 6 states that “in undertaking land contracts in rural areas, women shall enjoy equal rights with men. The legitimate rights and interests of women shall be protected in contract.”
Employment Promotion Law (2008)	Article 27 states that employers “shall not refuse to employ women or raise recruitment standards for females by using gender as an excuse, except where the types of work or posts are not suitable for women as prescribed by the State.” According to this law, employers cannot discriminate according to marital or child bearing status.
Anti-Domestic Violence (2016)	This Law is developed for purposes of preventing and curbing domestic violence, protecting the lawful rights and interests of family members, maintaining equal, harmonious and civilized family relations, and promoting family harmony and social stability. There is no reference to sexual violence or violence in same sex households/ couples.

China is also signatory to many international conventions aimed at addressing gender inequality. This includes the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) which China ratified in 1980 although human rights observers have noted that there is still work to be done on women’s empowerment, political participation, health and violence against women, and some sub-groups such as girls, rural women, older women and others are at risk of being left behind ([Zhang 2017](#)). China is also committed to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which include a

<sup>4</sup> Equality between women and men (gender equality): refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. See [link](#) for more details.

<sup>5</sup> The [UN High Level Panel on WEE final report](#) defines the economic empowerment of women—as the ability to “to succeed and advance economically and to make and act on economic decisions” (p1). Since the Beijing Platform for Action agreed by governments at the UN Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, it has been recognised that achieving gender equality in the economy and more broadly, requires specific, targeted efforts to build women’s economic agency and control of economic resources at all levels.

specific gender equality goal (SDG5) as well as wider targets on gender equality and women's economic empowerment. Yet gender or women's rights were not mentioned as a key area to be prioritised in China's actions on the implementation of the SDGs ([UN 2016](#)).

The current national policy framework for gender equality and women's development is the *China National Program for Women's Development (CNPWD) (2011-2020)*, which covers seven areas - health, education, economy, political participation, social security, environment and law. Priorities on women and the economy are: eliminating gender discrimination in employment, promoting women's full employment, raising the level of women's employment in urban units, narrowing the income gap between men and women, and protecting rural women's land rights and interests (EU, 2017). The National Working Committee on Children and Women (NWCCW) under the State council is the key body which is mandated to "organise, coordinate, guide, supervise and urge departments concerned in promoting gender equality and women's development" ([State Council Information Office 2015](#)). Concerns have been raised by the CEDAW Committee regarding the mandate or budget to implement policies of the NWCCW ([UN CEDAW 2014](#) p. 4). A recent assessment suggested that resources had been increased but that formal mechanisms for mainstreaming gender equality in policy or law making in China at the national level are still lacking ([EU 2017](#)).

The All China Women's Federation (ACWF) - a 'mass organisation' promoting women's rights and gender equality at all levels, which is closely linked to NWCCW - is involved in consultations on laws and policies at provincial levels and has the capacity to provide research and policy advice as well as direct services including entrepreneurship and wider training, finance and hotlines to report abuses. Although labelled as a Non-Governmental Organisation, ACWF has a longstanding relationship with the CPC. ACWF can push agendas, propose new policies or changes to existing policies and voice opposition to policy proposals, but is unable to make policy itself (Bannister 2015 in [EU 2017](#)).

Civil society organisations strive to apply a rights-based approach in line with the international human rights framework, and have achieved some success but are operating in an increasingly restricted space. Women's NGOs have used the international human rights mechanisms and instruments to monitor the government's commitments; they also typically conduct gender training for government officials, development practitioners and NGOs, to support the mainstreaming of gender into development programmes. There are 45 women's national or international NGOs that are registered with the authorities ([China Development Brief 2019](#)). Civil society is also dedicated to the mobilization of civil society, especially youth, utilising ICT to reach a larger audience ([Jones 2012](#)).

Recently there is a disjuncture between policy rhetoric and controlling the activity of women's rights groups. For example, in 2015 the CPC and UN Women jointly held the "Global Leaders' Meeting on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Commitment to Action" in New York where President Xi Jinping stressed the importance of gender equality: "The pursuit of gender equality is a great cause. A review of history shows that without women's liberation and progress, the liberation and progress of mankind would not be attainable". Yet at the same time there has been greater crackdown on women's rights organisations. For instance, in March 2015 five members of the women's rights group Weizhiming were detained after handing out leaflets and placing stickers on public buses and subways to raise awareness about sexual harassment ([Patience 2015](#)). In February 2016 Zhongze Centre—a flagship legal service for women in Beijing was closed by the CPC.

## Social norms context and challenges

### Property and land ownership and control:

Despite a central legal framework that protects women's property interests, ambiguity in the property and marriage laws allows village leaders to reassert traditional social norms and deny constitutional equal rights guarantees for women ([Liaw 2008](#)). Gender distribution of property wealth is uneven. According to the Third National Survey on the Social Status of Chinese Women in 2010, only 37.9 percent of women own housing property (including those who co-own it with husbands), compared to 67.1 percent of men ([WSIC 2010](#)). Reasons include: that female partners generally have a lower income than the males and therefore contribute less to the financing of the family home ([Deng et al. \(2018\)](#)); and the fact that intergenerational transfers generally follow the patrilineal line. There is also greater social pressure on men to buy a home than women ([Attane 2012](#)). A growing number of women experience pressure to transfer their land ownership to their husband's name upon marriage, but those who do retain land in their own name on marriage may lose it to their husbands during divorce ([Hare et al. 2007](#), US Department of State 2016 in [OECD 2018](#)).

### Paid work, marriage and childbearing

Despite women's high level of labour force participation and contribution to the economy, there are pervasive gender stereotypes that prioritise women's reproductive roles as dutiful wives over their productive role in the labour market. In the last ten years, the term "leftover women"—educated, unmarried women over the age of 27—has emerged as a visible stereotype in popular consciousness ([Feldshuh 2017](#)) perhaps encouraged by the state to ease a rapidly aging population as well as to drive-up family related purchases to boost the economy ([Wang 2017](#)). Recent political and economic changes have had significant impacts: firstly, the relaxing of the one-child policy in 2016 risks worsening employment discrimination. Employers fear that women will have two maternity leave periods or will resign due to "family pressures" ([Campbell 2018](#), [The Economist 2018](#)).<sup>6</sup> A survey published by Ganji.com (cited in [Villarias 2016](#)) revealed that 56 percent of women admitted that having a second child would affect their career negatively. Secondly greater disposable household income has lessened the need for women to earn an income ([Feng 2017](#)). The supply of publicly-funded kindergartens has decreased and while private childcare services have proliferated, these are unaffordable to those in low-income households ([Cook 2013](#)). This has had a particular burden on older women who are grandmothers as they have to withdraw from the labour force to take on a larger share of childcare responsibilities ([Lin and Wang 2017](#)).

### Gender-based violence

Gender based violence in the workplace and more widely domestic violence (DV) are pervasive in China and can affect women's full participation in the workforce. The recent passing of the Domestic Violence act means more attention is now focused on this issue. The law does not address sexual violence in marriage or gender-based violence in the workplace. The Asia Foundation survey of 706 employees (80 percent women) and 93 employers (73 percent women), found that 13% of respondents experienced domestic violence (DV) in the past 12 months, and nearly half of these survivors also experienced violence in the workplace. In addition, 56% had witnessed DV suffered by acquaintances and 66% of these witnesses have seen the victims continue to be abused by their partners in the workplace. Employers have limited understanding of the requirements under domestic

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<sup>6</sup> When a female employee is pregnant, the employer must continue to pay her salary and benefits, in addition to the cost of hiring another person to fill the place during the pregnant woman's absence from work (pregnancy checks, maternity leave, breastfeeding leave, leave of absence when the child is sick and so on). In addition, mothers of young children may be much less flexible in terms of working time due to childcare responsibilities. This is particularly problematic in China where overtime may be required at short notice, often unpaid or underpaid ([Cooke 2017](#)).



violence law and are concerned about engaging in anti-domestic violence efforts ([Asia Foundation 2017](#)). Social norms related to masculinity are a major risk factor for gender-based violence. For instance in a survey of 1,103 women and 1,017 men aged 18-49 years, [UNFPA \(2013\)](#) finds that 73 percent of men believed men had to be tough and 52 percent of men supported men's use of violence to defend their reputation. Survivors of violence experience shame and anxiety, self-blame, and fear that they are damaging family honour ([SRVI 2007](#)).

## 3. Entry points for Prosperity Fund programming

### Rule of Law for business

Despite Constitutional guarantees that women should enjoy the same rights as men (Mayer Brown LLP 2009), and labour laws that ban gender discrimination, the laws are often vague and unenforceable so that in practice it is hard to bring cases of gender discrimination through the legal system. Moreover, a “resurgence of long-repressed traditional values” means that “in the office, Socialist-era egalitarianism has been replaced by open sexism, in some cases reinforced by the law” ([Tatlow and Forsythe 2015](#)). For example, legally, women must retire earlier than men—aged 60 for men and 50 for women—which is the largest gender gap in the world ([World Bank 2018](#)).

China fulfils most of the criteria for equality in the World Bank Women, Business and the Law dataset, but there are remaining areas of weakness in the law or discrimination related to paid paternity leave; equal remuneration for work of equal value; restrictions on women working in jobs deemed hazardous, arduous or morally inappropriate or working in the same industry as men; and in provisions to prohibit discrimination by creditors based on sex ([World Bank 2018](#)).

Women's groups and networks have been active in promoting changes in the law and using international human rights instruments and transnational norms as catalysts for change, particularly at the provincial level ([de Silva de Alwis 2010 p. 301](#)). Gaps identified above suggest that tackling discrimination among employers and creditors (see Box 1 below), promoting workplace provision for paid paternity as well as maternity leave are key areas to address, as well as the building the capacity of women as managers and on Boards. A further area to consider is how to strengthen property rights of women in both land and housing. Regarding the revised marriage law, there are concerns about its lack of operational provisions and enforcement mechanisms, and well as a lack of protection for women's land and property rights ([Ogletree and de Silva de Alwis 2004](#), [EU 2017](#))

#### **Box 1: Tackling gender discrimination in the workplace.**

ACWF has been advocating for greater enforcement was on the prohibiting of gender discrimination during recruitment. In February 2019, this effort successfully translated into a joint notice by Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, ACWF and Supreme People's Court which stated that employers would pay a RMB50,000 fine if there is any overt gender discrimination during the hiring process. This includes advertising preferred gender, asking questions about and setting restrictions on marriage and childbearing, and organizing pregnancy tests ([Global Times 2019](#)).

### Financial Services and Digital Technology

Approximately 120 million people in China do not have proper access to financial services which limits their possibilities to save, invest in their future and participate in China's economic success ([Osmond 2018](#)). Currently male-dominated large corporations and state-owned enterprises have access to finance, while small- and medium-sized companies of which a larger proportion are women-owned, struggle to receive loans for small- and long-term investments.

Despite some recent improvements, [World Bank Global Findex \(2017\)](#) data shows that in all domains men have greater access than women to financial services and to ICT and mobile phone technology (see Table 2) for accessing finance. However, there have been dramatic increases among men and women who have made or received digital payments; a 26 and 21 percent increase by men and women respectively from 2014 to 2017.

**Table 2: Financial services by gender**

	2014		2017	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Have an account at a financial institution (% age 15+).	81	76	84	76
Saved to start, operate, or expand a farm or business (% age 15+)	26	17	18	13
Borrowed to start, operate, or expand a farm or business (% age 15+)	8	6	14	11
Used a mobile phone or the internet to access an account (% age 15+)	No data	No data	41	39
Credit card ownership (% age 15+)	18	15	23	18
Made or received digital payments in the past year (% age 15+)	46	43	72	64

Source: [World Bank Global Findex \(2017\)](#)

Wider evidence corroborates women’s relative lack of access to financial services and the reasons behind this. A 2002 study by the China Women Entrepreneurs Association showed that many women used their own savings to start businesses (30 percent) or relied on family and friends (33 percent). More than half felt their biggest obstacle was lack of capital (China Women Entrepreneurs Association 2002 cited in [Scott and Jin 2014](#)). In a study of 300 women entrepreneurs, [Scott and Jin \(2014\)](#) find that hesitancy to engage in bank financing was due to three reasons: firstly, women felt bankers overlooked their credit readiness and subscribed more to social norms that place women in the home; secondly a cultural convention that clients would socialize with their bankers made women fearful for their safety and created problems with husbands and in-laws; and thirdly the women were worried that banks would exert excessive control over their businesses. These entrepreneurs asked for more women to be hired by banks, with the authority to make loans.

Microcredit specifically targeting women has proven to be more effective, and women borrowers have a high success rate in their activities and repayments. Microcredit schemes have also helped women gain confidence and respect for their newly exhibited leadership abilities ([ADB 2006](#)). Other success stories in improving access to finance have involved heightening awareness of senior managers in formal financial institutions of reaching women, by tapping into their interests and incentives. An example from IFC is highlighted in Box 2.

**Box 2: Microloan programme with the Bank of Deyang**

In 2009, IFC approved a US\$31 million equity investment to the Bank of Deyang. Following gender sensitivity training to Bank of Deyang’s managers, the bank launched a microloan programme for women, which has disbursed US\$2 million to 322 women entrepreneurs, creating more than 1,000 jobs. The bank also opened the first branch exclusively dedicated to women. Bank of Deyang became the first Chinese bank to join the Global Banking Alliance for Women ([World Bank 2014](#)).

Source: [World Bank 2014](#)

**Infrastructure**

Infrastructure development in recent years has been a top priority for China’s government, and the importance of infrastructure development to address widening regional disparities between the eastern seaboard and central/western areas ([ADB 2008](#), [McKinsey 2019](#)). For women who are “left behind” in rural areas while their husbands migrate to the cities, public infrastructure is poor which compromises their economic opportunities. A study in rural Hunan province that focuses on left-behind women whose husbands have migrated found that the county and township government “does not think that left-behind women have many difficulties needing attention, and believe the main

issues facing them are marital and mental health problems” ([Ye et al. 2016 p. 938](#)). The need for and momentum around infrastructure investment is a potential entry point to address the priorities that women and girls have from infrastructure.

There are existing examples of where gender issues have been incorporated into transport initiatives which provide useful lessons for this and other areas of infrastructure development in terms of both setting priorities and creating employment that can contribute to WEE. In an example from Liaoning province, the inputs from women and girls resulted in enhanced secondary roads and traffic management, new paths and pedestrian crossings, the introduction of public lighting and more frequent bus services ([OECD and International Transport Forum 2016](#)). Box 3 below showcases another example whereby all-women road maintenance groups were set up, with infrastructural improvements and favourable gender outcomes creating a “win-win” scenario.

### **Box 3: Road Maintenance Groups in Yunnan Province**

In the past, rural road maintenance in Yunnan Province was carried out through occasional voluntary contributions from communities living along the road, complemented by provincial and local maintenance subsidies for the purchase of materials. Maintenance quality was suboptimal, and the roads continued to deteriorate. In view of the need for an improved system, a USD1.5 million rural road component was incorporated in the Yunnan Integrated Road Network Development Project (YIRNDP) which was approved by ADB in 2010, covering at least 650 km of rural roads. This makes it possible to finance the remuneration of road maintenance groups. As a result of the project, road conditions were improved significantly and approximately 18,000 workdays of employment were created for women from low-income households, many of whom were ethnic minorities. Women experienced increased intra-household decision-making power and increased respect from other community members. Road maintenance is a continuous activity to be repeated annually, thereby providing sustainable employment.

Source: [ADB \(2011\)](#)

## **Energy and Low-Carbon Economy**

China has the world’s largest financial commitment to renewable energy, investing over USD100 billion in 2015. Under the 13<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan (2016-2020), the country aims to have 750 GW of renewable capacity available—more than all the countries of the OECD combined – and create 13 million more clean energy jobs by the end of the decade ([Broussard 2017](#)).

There is new drive to address the gender dimensions of energy both at the global level and within China. At the Paris Climate Change Conference (COP21) in 2015 UNEP and UN Women launched the Global Programme to Promote Women’s Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Energy, which “builds on the recognition that the transition to sustainable energy requires a paradigm shift; instead of being passive providers and users of energy, women must become agents of change in promoting energy technologies” (CCICED 2019 p. 32).<sup>7</sup> In China, the National Programme for Women’s Development 2011-2020 target on women and the environment, “advocate for women’s participation in energy conservation and low-carbon living” is one of the four major goals.

UN Women China is seeking to collaborate with the private sector on innovative approaches to support women in being leaders in promoting sustainable energy for their own and communities’ empowerment. As the global green energy leader, successfully addressing gender in the context of China’s renewable energy industry is an opportunity for mainstreaming gender in renewable energy both nationally and globally ([Broussard 2017](#)).

## **Health**

China has relatively favourable health outcomes for women overall, in some areas better than men. The adult female mortality rate is 67 per 1000, whereas for men it is 92 ([UNDP 2018](#)). Despite some progress, however, the sex ratio at birth remains skewed towards male births due to sex selection: in

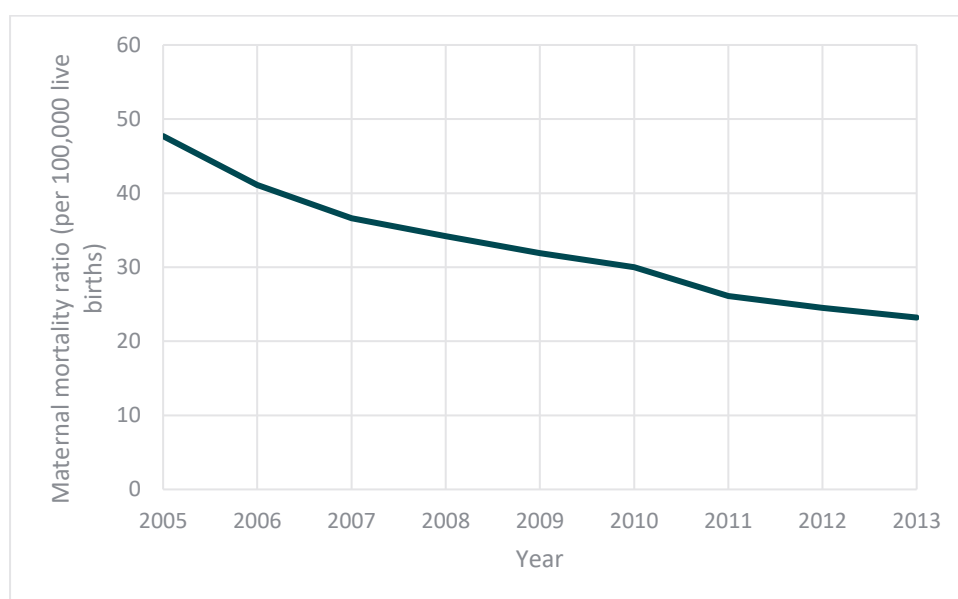
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<sup>7</sup> This paper has yet to be published.

2010 there was 117.94 male live births per 100 females. The two child policy may not automatically reduce pressures in this area in addition to potential other gender effects (see above) ([EU 2017](#)).

Remarkable progress has been made in maternal health overall: China halved its maternal mortality ratio in eight years from 2005 to 2013 (see Figure 1). Women’s health is faring better than men’s also in non-communicable diseases: for the top three causes of death—malignant tumour, heart disease and cerebrovascular disease—women have lower rates than men. In urban and rural areas, the most common cause of death for women is heart disease whereas for men it is malignant tumour ([UN Women 2016](#)). Differences in health outcomes is largely due to the lifestyle of men in China rather than better health care provision to women. For instance, 48.6 percent of men over 15 years old have smoked any tobacco product compared to only 1.8 percent of women ([WHO 2015](#)).

Figure 1: Maternal Mortality Ratio (per 1000 live births)



Source: [World Bank \(2019\)](#)

The progress in women’s health is not equally shared between different social groups. Rural women and older women in particular are disadvantaged. In 2015, the lowest county-level maternal mortality ratio was 3.4 per 100 000 livebirths in Nanhu District, Zhejiang Province, and the highest was in Zanda County, Tibet, at 830.5 per 100 000 livebirths ([Liang et al. 2019](#)). Among those who are older than 60, also, men have better health status than women ([Wang and Lu 2017](#)).

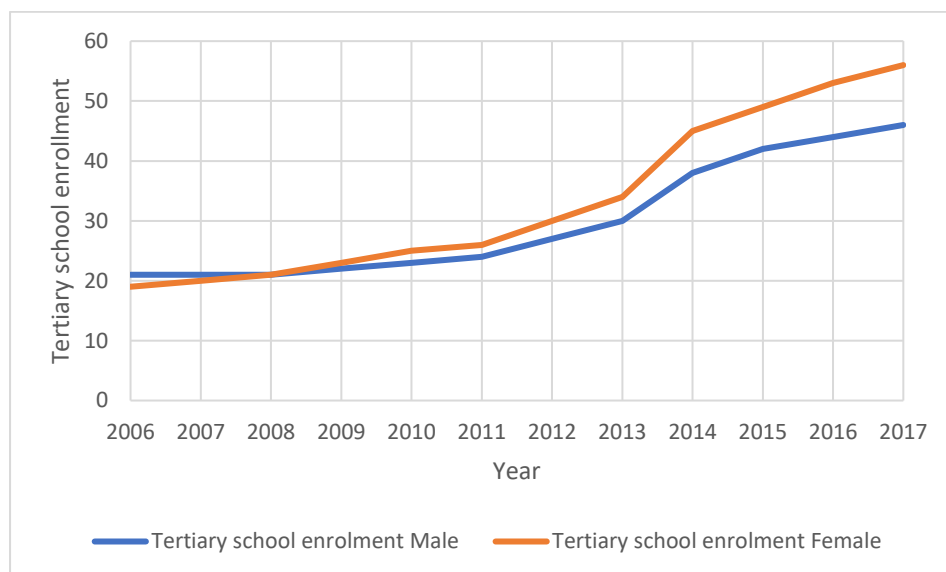
Other emerging issues include lack of Sexual Health and Reproductive Health (SHRH) targeting younger unmarried people, given the universal expectation of marriage, and rent-seeking from medical practitioners ([EU 2017](#)). [Song and Bian \(2014\)](#) found that there is greater medical expenditure on men compared to women for five common conditions, suggesting that out-of-pocket health expenditures for women are common. Other health disparities are that between 25 and 40 percent more women kill themselves each year than men and for women in rural areas the rate is four to five times higher compared to urban areas (Ren 2016). Eating disorders are more prevalent for women than men, especially among urban women (see [Chen and Jackson 2008](#)). For example in a study of 8,300 women workers across 4 provinces in a variety of electronic factories found that 51.9 percent were exposed to one or more occupational hazards ([Yu et al. 2013](#)). Compared with men, women in informal employment have more serious health problems but seek medical attention less frequently ([Liu and Bryson, 2017](#)). Financial constraints, distrust of doctors and medical expenses, unfriendly

treatment environments and traditional attitudes about health and illness among women were the main barriers to health seeking behaviour.

## Skills

From 2006 to 2017, the gender disparity between boys and girls at primary and secondary levels has gone from parity or near-parity to a situation that is slightly in favour of girls ([World Bank 2019](#)). In tertiary education the disparity is more marked, as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Tertiary education enrolment



Women make up 46 percent of all upper-secondary graduates from vocational programmes, while the proportion of women graduating from post-secondary non-tertiary vocational programmes is 25 percent ([OECD 2016](#)).

Educational progress for women has not necessarily translated into equal economic opportunities in the workplace, particularly at senior levels and there is persistent occupational segregation. In a list of 108 countries on women's percentage share of all managers, China was placed 85<sup>th</sup> with a percentage of 16.8 ([ILO 2015](#)) and in 2018, women made up only 9.4 percent of board directors from publicly traded companies in China ([WEF 2019](#)). Pressures and barriers to their progress arising from entrenched patriarchal and collectivist norms have likely hindered their career progression ([Woodhams and Xian 2014](#)). There is a need for initiatives that challenge discriminatory practices and social norms in the workplace and also foster workplace environments that view women as equally capable, including as leaders. Tackling occupational segregation is also a priority.

A few initiatives are focusing on the need to develop skills and opportunities for women in agriculture. For example, capitalizing on growing demand for organic produce in rural areas in western China, Eurasia Foundation China is replicating and scaling-up a sustainable organic agriculture model as part of the China Rural Women's Empowerment programme ([Eurasia Foundation 2019](#)). Another example is a woman entrepreneur who has established the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model in China, whereby consumers buy organic meat and vegetables directly from producers. There are now 500 CSA farms in the country and national CSA conferences in Beijing ([Yu 2015](#)).

# Annex 1: Background to and Scope of Country Brief

The UK Prosperity Fund in China consists of a portfolio of seven thematic programme areas, aligned with China's key economic priorities, designed to help China's ongoing transition to an inclusive, sustainable and productive economy and achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The first phase (£85m ODA, 2017-2022, implemented with DFID and DIT) comprises four programmes covering **Rule of Law for Business; Financial Services; Energy and Low Carbon Economy; and Infrastructure**. Phases 2 and 3 (£1.95m ODA, 2018 – 2023, implemented with DFID and DIT) comprise three programmes covering **Health, Skills, and Future Cities**.

In line with the UK International Development and Gender Equality Acts and the FCO and Prosperity Fund (PF) Gender and Inclusion (G&I) policy, PF programmes are required to consider potential impacts on women as well as men. Prosperity Fund ambition goes beyond this to considering potentially transformative opportunities for women's economic empowerment, building on UK government policy and international commitments, notably the [UN High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment](#). Considering gender in programme design and implementation can improve women's economic opportunities, control of resources, income and participation in decision making. It can also lead to wider improvements in overall skills, productivity and labour force participation as well as reduced market failures, contributing to more inclusive and sustainable growth and prosperity. Reduced gender barriers can also enhance the enabling environment for business.

This China "Country Brief" is intended to support the work of Prosperity Fund (PF) programme staff, implementing partners and other officials at post and at the centre from a range of government departments as well as from the Joint Funds Unit, to identify areas of potential support that can promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment, considering the PF mandate.

The Country Brief is framed around the following three questions.

Q1: What are key gender gaps, disparities and barriers in China (headline statistics and brief narrative) related to PF purpose and main areas of intervention?

Q2: What is the enabling environment in China for addressing gender inequality and promoting WEE?

Q3. What opportunities are there for PF programmes to address GE and WEE in key sectors of intervention?

## Annex 2: Statistical tables and data sources

### **Female: male population ratio**

0.94 [Global Gender Gap Report 2018 - World Economic Forum](#)

National: 0.956 (Rural: 0.959, Urban: 0.938) [National Bureau of Statistics 2018](#)

### **Female to male Labour Force Participation rate**

0.83 [Global Gender Gap Report 2018 - World Economic Forum](#)

1991	1995	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
0.86	0.86	0.85	0.84	0.82	0.82	0.82	0.82	0.82	0.81	0.81	0.81

### **UNDP Human Development Data**

National	0.815
Urban	0.650
Rural	1.019

Source: 2010 3rd National Women Status Survey

### **Female to male Labour Force Participation rate in the informal sector**

1.10 ([ILO Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture](#))

	Formal employment (%)		Informal employment (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Agriculture	1.6	5.8	5.7	24.5
Industry	12.6	2.9	18.1	3.2
Services	85.8	91.3	76.2	72.3
Total	100	100	100	100

[ILO Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture p. 123](#)

### **Female and male employment by sector**

	2000	2017
Employment in agriculture, female (% of female employment)	47.1	20.5
Employment in agriculture, male (% of male employment)	41.1	15.2
Employment in industry, female (% of female employment)	30.5	21.6
Employment in industry, male (% of male employment)	26.2	30.5
Employment in services, female (% of female employment)	22.4	57.9
Employment in services, male (% of male employment)	32.8	54.3

Source: [World Bank Gender Data Portal](#)

**Female to male unemployment**

	2000	2017
Modelled ILO estimate	0.82	0.84

[World Bank Gender Data Portal](#)

1991	1995	2000	2005	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
0.86	0.84	0.82	0.82	0.80	0.79	0.80	0.80	0.78	0.78	0.80	0.84

[UNDP Human Development Data](#)

**Gender wage gap**

Standard measure: 17.2%

Factor weighted: 20.8%

Source: [ILO Global Wage Report 2018/19](#)

**% of firms with female top manager**

17.5 [World Bank Group Enterprise Surveys](#)

**Access to land (Share of land owned by women)**

Share of agricultural land holders (male) 96% [[OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)]

Collaborating with China Renmin University and Michigan State University, Landesa (an NGO focusing on land rights issues), conducted a survey on land rights to 1791 farmers in 17 provinces in China in 2011. These provinces together contain an estimated three quarters of China's rural population. They found that only 17.1 percent of existing contracts and 38.2 percent of existing certificates include women's names ([Landesa 6<sup>th</sup> 17-province China Survey](#)).

In a study of 3,500 households across seven provinces in China (Liaoning, Fujian, Jiangxi, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu and Hunan), in more than 95 percent of the sample households the man's name alone appears on the certificate, and this is considered the norm. Although female heads of household are more receptive than all heads of household to the idea of women signing the certificate, about one in six households headed by women still choose to put a man's name on their certificate ([Gender and Land reform: The Gender Dimensions of China's Forest Tenure Reform](#)).

**Connectivity – access to mobiles and/or broadband**

Mobile Owners (%)		Mobile Internet Users (%)	
Men	Women	Men	Women
97	97	75	72

Source: [Connected Women: The Mobile Gender Gap Report 2018](#)

**Female to male average incomes**



0.62 [Global Gender Gap Report 2018 - World Economic Forum](#)

**Poverty and /or food insecurity/ hunger rates by sex**

% of females who are food insecure	% of males who are food insecure	Difference (f/m)
3.9	4.39	-0.49

Source: [UN Women Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development p. 7](#)

**Time use: Female to male share of unpaid care work.**

2.36 [[Global Gender Gap Report 2018 - World Economic Forum](#)]

2.67 [[Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development p. 7](#)]

2.6 [[OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index](#)]

	Ratio
National	2.57
Rural	3.33
Urban	2.14

Source: [2008 Time Use Survey](#)