

Opening Address

CEC-ACWF-ILO Field Test and TOT Workshop: GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise

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Distinguished

On behalf of the ILO it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Field Test and Training of Trainers Workshop on GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise, co-organized by the CEC, the ACWF and the ILO.

The International Labour Organization is the United Nations Agency which deals with labour and employment issues. In all ILO member States, including China, the ILO cooperates with the government and organizations representing employers and workers, as well as with social partners like the All China Women Federation to promote decent work for all workers, men and women, who need to earn a living to look after their family.

In China the ILO has been active in promoting small enterprise development for many years. A healthy economy depends not only on big businesses but also thrives on the many small businesses which provide valuable services to society and employ millions of people. We have been doing this by strengthening the CEC, the MOLSS, the ACFTU and the ACWF in facilitating business development services, such as entrepreneurship training, and also providing financial services to workers, especially those workers who face disadvantages in the labour market.

For example, with MOLSS, the ILO introduced the Start Your Business (SYB) training for laid-off workers since 2001. It started in the pilot cities of Jilin, Zhangjiakou and Baotou and now covers 80 cities in the country. In this project, the government claims that 170,000 persons have been trained and 50% of them are now running their own businesses. The project is now extending to other target groups like young graduates and migrant workers as well.

What is the situation of women entrepreneurs? With the economic reform and opening up of China, more women in China have started to run their own business. Since 1999, China is creating a facilitating political and economic environment for private enterprises, and since then the number of women-run businesses has been growing fast.

Also, another aspect of women entrepreneurs should be noted: In the current labour surplus economy, men are being given preference over women in employment and occupation. Thus, many women establish their own micro enterprises and engage in various forms of flexible labour arrangements for survival purposes.

But women entrepreneurs still account for less than 20 per cent of the total number of entrepreneurs. Why is this so? Many women entrepreneurs face considerable obstacles. Four main constraints curb the development of women entrepreneurs:

- 1) traditional norms, values and attitudes on roles of women in culture which

- lead to discriminatory practices against women
- 2) lack of know-how and knowledge on running a business. At present, too many female laid-off workers want to run their own businesses, but they have received little training before
 - 3) lack of marketing skills to expand their business network
 - 4) financing difficulties: almost all women entrepreneurs face problems in getting funds.

The ILO was therefore very pleased that the CEC wished to establish a Women Entrepreneurs' Resource Center (WERC) in 2003. It aims to address these problems and difficulties faced by women entrepreneurs especially those from the lower-income groups. Priority target groups for WERC are women who are self-employed, migrants, laid-off older workers or unemployed first-time jobseekers, engaged in the service industries. The WERC will effectively address the needs of these women micro-entrepreneurs by increasing their capacity for self- and business development, enhancing their networking skills and linking them with experienced, successful and committed women entrepreneurs.

The CEC and ILO started to cooperate on WERC in 2004 with a view to:

- 1) Validate and test the GET Ahead training package in China.
- 2) Train trainers from organizations who intend to give GET Ahead training to unemployed women and job seekers wishing to start or already engaged in micro enterprises.
- 3) Have more women entrepreneurs establish viable businesses which also leads to employment opportunities for others.
- 4) Have more women entrepreneurs become members of CEC and be involved with its activities.
- 5) Establish and pilot an interactive WERC website to stimulate information exchange and set up a mentor mechanism between successful and low-income women.

In order to assist CEC partner organizations in promoting enterprise development among women in poverty, ILO developed the training package *Gender and Entrepreneurship Together – GET Ahead for Women in Enterprise*. This training package addresses the practical and strategic needs of women in enterprise by strengthening their basic business and people management skills. It shows women how to develop a business mind and their personal entrepreneurial traits and how to obtain support through groups, networks and institutions dealing with enterprise development.

Following a needs assessment and familiarization mission of CEC and ILO in Shanghai and Cixi in August last year, we were very encouraged that the ACWF and CEC members in Cixi and Shanghai agreed to cooperate with us in fieldtesting and organizing TOT workshop on the GET Ahead.

By the end of this week, we hope to reach the following successes:

- 1) GET Ahead training package will be tested and adapted for use in China
- 2) 25 trainers will be trained in the GET Ahead content and participatory training methods
- 3) Training plans will be developed by the participants to train unemployed women and job seekers within their organizations
- 4) Regular communication will take place between the participants and CEC.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, finally I would like to let you know that it is a great pleasure for the ILO to work with the CEC and the ILO on this training event. This is a participatory training workshop and we count on your expertise to critically go through the package with us. We welcome comments and suggestions for improvement as it is important to ensure that this GET Ahead tool will be appropriate for your target group in China. We hope that all of you will enjoy the training and may wish to use it later in training your beneficiaries. I wish you all success and a productive outcome of this week.

Thank you.