

Key themes for Save the Children UK in China:

- Education
- Protection
- Health
- Emergency relief



China is undergoing huge economic and social reform. In material terms, there have been impressive improvements in the standard of living over the last 25 years. Yet there is a widening gap between rich and poor. Millions have been left unemployed and with little access to health services, education or social security. Four million children – particularly those from minority ethnic groups living in the rural west of the country – live in poverty.

Since 1990 more than 120 million people have moved from rural areas to cities in search of better opportunities. Migrant children lose traditional support structures and are more likely to come into conflict with the law, be homeless, abandoned or trafficked (to a city within China or another country to work in the sex industry, as organised petty criminals or to provide cheap labour). Children are also affected by the rapid increase in HIV and AIDS.

SAVE THE CHILDREN IN CHINA

Save the Children UK contributed to flood relief efforts in China during the 1930s and provided material assistance to victims of the war with Japan. We worked with Vietnamese refugees in Hong Kong during the 1970s and 1980s and in 1988 our work resumed in mainland China. The country programme office relocated in 1995 from Hong Kong to Kunming, Yunnan province and, in 1999, transferred to Beijing. Programme teams work from provincial level offices in Xinjiang (the north west), Tibet (the far west), Yunnan (the south west), Anhui (central, eastern), with small sub offices in Guangxi (the south west) and Shanghai (the east). New sub-offices in Chongqing (central) and Jilin (north east) open this year (2006-07). We are currently applying for registration as Save the Children China, but expect this process to take some time.

Our activities broadly focus on: education, HIV and AIDS, and working with children without family care and protection. A team has been built up in the capital, Beijing, to support policy development, research and lobbying at national level as well as to provide technical support to the provincial programmes. Building on successful pilot initiatives, we are now extending our programmes more widely. Five year plans for education, health and protection work will guide replication. Scaling up our work across such a huge and diverse country is challenging, but possible because of strong government structures.

KEY AREAS OF WORK

Education

Save the Children strives to improve the quality of and access to education. In Tibet (since 1992), Yunnan (since 1999) and Xinjiang (since 2006), we have been working to ensure that basic

education is enjoyable and stimulating for all students and that it prepares them for real life. Our teacher training programme introduces teachers to the use of games and group work in classes. Teachers learn how to make their own teaching materials from whatever resources are available, to make their classes more interesting and relevant for children.

The training also covers children's rights so that teachers and school administrators can better understand what it means to make their schools child-friendly. In particular, child protection has started to feature more prominently, encouraging teachers to stop corporal punishment and take action against bullying.

Last year more than 1,300 students attended Save the Children-supported vocational training projects in Yunnan, where subjects ranged from how to farm pigs, mushrooms and camellias, to hotel service and business management. We support similar projects in Tibet. Save the Children is working with the China National Institute for Education Research under the Ministry of Education to replicate our learner-centred and child-friendly education model to a further six provinces. Work has begun in three provinces – Qinghai, Anhui, and Jilin. Pilot counties have been selected and teacher training by trained teachers from Yunnan is being planned.

We are also working to make education more accessible to children with disabilities. In Anhui we have been working to support inclusion of disabled children in mainstream primary schools. This will be replicated in other provinces. In both Anhui and Yunnan, we have been helping schools for deaf children to introduce a bilingual/bicultural approach to teaching. Children with profound hearing loss learn 'natural' sign language from deaf teachers, alongside the current curriculum based on written Chinese characters.

Protection

Children in care

Around 50,000 orphaned and abandoned children and those with disabilities live in state welfare homes or with state-paid foster parents. In addition, a recent research study we supported identified more than 570,000 orphaned children living with their next of kin, many of whom were living in poverty. Over the past decade, Save the Children has been working with local and national policy-makers to improve the quality of care for these children. In 1994 we set up a project in partnership with the local authorities in Guangde and Anhui to create small group, family homes, where a group of five or six children live with a trained housemother who cares for them. This enables children to remain living with the people and places they know. Endorsed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs as ensuring the children are healthier, more active and more responsive, the small-group, family home has been taken up as a national model for children in care.

We work with the Ministry of Civil Affairs on developing national standards and guidelines for foster care. We have taken senior officials to learn from initiatives in other countries, including the UK, Denmark, South Africa and Romania. We facilitated the first child-led research into children in care, which was presented at a national conference in 2003. Together with the Ministry, we have developed a foster care training manual that will be sent to all welfare homes across China.

The new policy for orphans launched by the government in May 2006 draws heavily on the research findings and lessons learned from study tours designed and supported by Save the Children.

Children's centres

As part of Save the Children's community-based approach to supporting and protecting vulnerable children, we have piloted children's activity centres or children's groups since 2001. These are run by children or with a large degree of children's participation and provide a space where children meet or come together regularly. These centres or groups act as hubs for linking up all those who work with children to provide a focus for child protection work. The Chinese government has asked us to replicate this community-based child protection approach to more provinces. A few well-established

centres, such as the Happy Family Club in San Li Jie, Anhui, have been officially registered as independent not-for-profit organisations, a clear sign that the authorities see their value. We will be replicating the child protection model in at least 30 locations in the next five years, distributing support equally between poor rural and urban areas with high numbers of vulnerable children. These centres will be networked and provide in-service social work training for staff, so that gradually they will form the basis of a child protection system in China.

Disability

Rights into Action – a group of disabled young people we have supported in Anhui who campaign for recognition of their rights and provision of appropriate services – has also been registered as an independent not-for-profit organisation. This is the first of its kind in China led by young people with disabilities. Since disabled children are among the poorest and most excluded group of children in China, we are supporting the replication of Rights into Action in other locations where we are supporting child protection work.

Youth justice

More and more children and young people are coming into conflict with the law. In Yunnan, Save the Children is piloting a scheme to protect young offenders from inappropriate punishments, especially custodial sentences, and give them a chance to rebuild their lives. A centre co-ordinates a support network for young offenders who are allowed back into the community, supervised by an appropriate adult, after negotiations with local authorities, police, judges and victims. Following a national seminar on youth justice reform, we have been requested to support its replication in a poor migrant neighborhood of Beijing. We will be working with the National Youth League, that we supported recently to revise the Law of Protection of Minors. Save the Children has also been asked to support them in setting up youth centres across the country, based on our experience of working with marginalized young people in the UK.

Migration, trafficking and street children

Save the Children has supported research to understand the issues surrounding migration, trafficking and street children and is working to promote 'safe migration'. This means raising awareness of the dangers of trafficking with children and young people in the remote minority ethnic communities and with their parents, local authorities and community leaders. We are also helping to build networks that migrants can turn to when they arrive in their destinations. With partners, we have produced a 'safe migration' textbook for school children that has been adopted by the education bureau in Ping Xiang, Guangxi province. We are also developing child protection work including establishing children's activity centers in some cities with large migrant communities, such as Nanning, Kunming, Shenzhen and Shanghai.

Government street children protection centres are the main provision for street children. We have supported several centres in training their staff on children's rights, protection and participation. Having jointly facilitated research led by street children, the Ministry of Civil Affairs has involved us in developing the first National Aid and Protection Regulation for Street Children.

Health

In many rural communities in China, people live without toilets and a supply of safe drinkable water, which are key to improving children's health. Save the Children has been working to provide these in Tibet. Working with the local communities, in the counties of Dhamsong, Lhasa valley and Ngamring, Shigatse prefecture, last year we built three new gravity water supply systems, bringing clean water to 619 villagers, 80 primary school pupils and three resident teachers. We also repaired two old water supply systems. A total of 200 household latrines were built in Nyimo county. Communities also took part in health promotion sessions, focused on basic hygiene and how to prevent water-borne diseases and the importance of exclusive breastfeeding for young babies.

At the end of 2005, China had an estimated 650,000 people living with HIV, 75,000 of whom had AIDS. Save the Children has been working with the Yunnan Provincial Education Department since 1996 on an HIV and AIDS peer education project in schools in the province. It was here that the AIDS epidemic in China began, on the border with Myanmar, with associated high rates of population movement, commercial sex workers and intravenous drug users.

Ruili City in Yunnan had the first reported cases of HIV and AIDS. The Ruili Women and Children's Centre, which we set up with the local government in August 2000 in response to the growing epidemic, is one of the centres now registered officially as a local NGO. In April 2004, the county government formally adopted a five-year strategy for combating HIV, AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) that we had helped to prepare. The Ruili Women and Children's Centre will play a critical outreach role with children and youth, both in prevention work, provision of youth friendly services including voluntary counselling, diagnosis and treatment of STDs, referral to the local hospital for HIV testing and provision of care.

In central provinces in China, there are high numbers of children orphaned by AIDS as a result of widespread blood-selling during the 1990s. In Fuyang, north-west Anhui, we have trained doctors and community health workers on HIV and AIDS healthcare and treatment. We have also set up five small-group, village-based family units in Fuyang to house 25 children orphaned by AIDS. Children's Centres have also been established in villages so that children have somewhere they can come together and play or study in a safe and happy environment.

Child-led research has been key to our work. Trained by our teams, children interview their peers to share their experiences and ideas about how HIV and AIDS affect their lives. We have published their research results in both Chinese and English. Their insights into the situations of children and their families can help us to devise better policies and projects. The research has also given the children techniques to analyse their problems and find solutions, and enabled them to influence the national policy to improve care for children affected by HIV and AIDS. We have since been supporting street children and children in foster care to undertake their own research to feed into policy development.

Emergency relief

Save the Children supports the Chinese government in providing relief to those affected by extreme weather conditions or natural disasters. For example, we are helping to repair schools in Long Chuan, which were damaged by floods in 2004. In January 2006, we assisted those put at risk by continuous heavy snowfall and dramatic drops in temperature in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. More than 220,000 people were cut off by the snow, and they lost some 9,000 head of livestock – the main source of income for families in the area. Save the Children provided households in the Altay Prefecture with food, children's winter clothes and coal, as well as corn to feed their animals.

We are supporting resumption of education for children whose schools were damaged by the floods caused by Typhoon Bilis, which struck southern China in July 2006.

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