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## UNICEF raises funds for Local Planning and Action of Children (LPAC) programme in China

Economic reforms in China have lifted an estimated 200 million people above the poverty line, but millions more remain below the World Bank-defined level of poverty of one dollar per day. In rural poor areas, infant mortality is high, and problems of stunting and malnutrition are prevalent. Poverty has deprived many children of their right to education. Serious gender inequalities exist. Despite significantly less education and much lower social-economic states than men, women are expected to bear most of the burdens of housework and agricultural production. Besides, villages are situated in the areas where it does not have access to safe drinking water. The lack of clean drinking water accelerates the spread of contagious and endemic diseases. Also lack of healthcare services threatens the survival of women and their children.

To address the social development, UNICEF launched the Social Development Programme for Poor Areas (SPPA) in 1996. This programme targeted 192 townships in 25 counties of 13 provinces which directly benefited 55,000 women and 110,000 children. At the conclusion of the SPPA Programme in 2000, the Local Planning and Action for Children (LPAC) Programme was launched in 2001 which incorporated experiences from SPPA with the objective of realizing the rights of children and women in poverty stricken areas. The LPAC programme has now been implemented in 34 poor counties of 11 provinces, covering a population of 7.5 million.

Unlike other poverty alleviation programmes, these two programmes integrated the provision of micro-credit with organizational building and training as a way to promote overall social and economic development. Women will form large and small groups and use their own resources to obtain micro credit loans for a variety of income generating activities. The groups meet on a regular basis, learning about hygiene and technical skills.

Micro-credit is a strategy for reducing poverty by providing more income to participants and reducing seasonal fluctuations in household income. In its most basic form, micro-credit is the practice of making very small (micro) loans to poor people so that they can launch small businesses. It addresses the difficulty the poor have in obtaining access to credit to start a business. By itself, however, micro-credit is often not enough to lift the poorest people from poverty. But when supplemented by training in health and education, healthier household practices result which in turn, improves the well-being of children.

Over the past nine years, UNICEF China has provided funding and technical assistance to SPPA and LPAC programmes. Both programmes are implemented in close partnership with the Ministry of Commerce as well as provincial and local governments.

Training and life skills activities provided through these programmes include the following elements:

**"Facts for Life"**. Focuses on child care practices and information including breastfeeding, child injury prevention, and treatment of children's diarrhea, emergency preparedness, iodine deficiency, and HIV/AIDS.

**Hygiene education**. Emphasizes personal and household hygiene practices and includes the adoption and use of sanitary latrines and soap.

**Production skills training**. To be relevant to income generation in rural areas, training typically centres on agriculture and animal husbandry.

**Functional literacy training**. Many participants cannot read, so literacy training is included in the LPAC Programme.

**HIV/AIDS prevention**. HIV and AIDS reduce incomes and rapidly increase poverty levels, so prevention activities are critical components of the LPAC Programme and UNICEF's anti-poverty efforts.

**Construction of sanitary latrines**. Because many households lack access to sanitary latrines, the LPAC Programme provides seed money to local communities for their construction at the household level.

Assessments conducted in 2000 and 2003 of the SPPA Programme showed access to micro-credit plus activities had a clear and positive impact on participating households.

This impact was visible in the following key areas:

**Access to sanitation and use of soap**. Thirty-four percent of households indicated they had improved their sanitation facilities since 2000. Improvements were small but significant, and participants showed a desire to move towards better, more hygienic facilities. All those who said they had improved their sanitation facilities indicated it was because of SPPA.

**Knowledge of AIDS**. Raising awareness of HIV/AIDS is one of the objectives of SPPA. The 2000 survey showed AIDS-related knowledge was much higher among SPPA members than among non-members, and over the three-year period between the two surveys it seemed that more people had become aware of the disease: 87 percent said they knew about AIDS in 2003 compared with 79 percent in 2000. Moreover, the depth of people's AIDS-related knowledge had risen: In 2000, only half of all survey respondents could name three or more AIDS transmission routes. In 2003, this figure had risen to 85 percent.

**Safe drinking water**. One of the programmes' main goals was to promote access to safe drinking water. The 2000 survey indicated safe drinking water was used by both SPPA members and non-members in roughly

similar proportion, so the 2003 survey asked how people's water sources had changed since 2000. Results showed 42 percent of SPPA households had further improved their access to better water sources: 66 percent were using piped, tubewell, or man-power pump well water compared with only 37 per cent in 2000. In general, 97 percent of SPPA members said the project had helped them improve their drinking water source.

**Health and nutrition status - Consumption of selected food items.** Eating more nutritious, protein-rich foods improves the health of children, particularly girls, who sometimes are the last household members to eat. The 2000 survey showed SPPA member families were more likely to eat meat, fish, chicken, eggs, and fruit than non-SPPA families, with the 2003 survey showing a further improvement in this positive trend. Whereas only 25 percent of SPPA families reported eating meat, fish, chicken, and eggs four or more times a week in 2000, 69 percent said they did so in 2003. SPPA borrowers also reported an improvement in the quantity and variety of the food their children consumed, with one-third indicating that these factors had improved greatly.

**Status of women.** A key objective of both the SPPA and LPAC Programmes was to improve the status of women in the family and the community. Both assessments found clear improvements in this regard. For example, about 62 percent of women said their relationship with their husbands had improved. When asked if their husbands listened to them more than before, 83 percent answered in the affirmative in 2003 compared with only 57 percent in 2000.

By the end of 2005, the following results are reached:

- Reach over 50,000 women with small loans in excess of US \$8 million.
- Training and informational materials for use in minority areas have been translated into local languages such as Uighur and Tibetan.
- Over 200 project staff has been trained in financial management.
- Over 5,000 small lending groups have been created to self-manage credit operations.
- Over 100,000 women have been trained in livestock rearing, fish farming, chicken and rabbit rearing, fruit drying, brick-making, and other income-generating skills.
- School scholarships have been provided to 2,200 female dropouts in Gansu, Sichuan, Henan, and Yunnan Provinces.

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