



# RIGHT TO BE HEARD: EMPOWERING DOMESTIC WORKERS IN MAINLAND CHINA





# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the work and contribution of our partners working on the Urban Livelihood Programme:

(in alphabetical order)

**Beijing Chengbiancun Information Co., Ltd.**

**Beijing Cultural Development Centre for Rural Women**

**Beijing Gender Cultural Development Centre**

**Beijing Jin Lin Social Service Centre**

**Economic Legality Research Centre of Anhui University**

**Jinan Gichon Social Service Centre for Community**

**School of Social Development and Public Policy, Fudan University**

**The Centre for Labour and Worklife Law of Southwest University of Political Science and Law**

**The Centre for Women's Development and Rights of Northwestern Polytechnic University**

**The Institute of Labour and Social Security Law of Peking University**

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# Executive Summary

According to conservative estimates in 2013, there were about 21.62 million domestic workers in mainland China. Due to traditional beliefs regarding domestic work and inadequacies in the legal system, domestic workers are subject to discrimination and labour rights violations, and have thus become one of the most vulnerable groups. Empowering informal workers and advocating for their rights has been one of the strategic objectives of the Urban Livelihood Programme of Oxfam Hong Kong (OHK).

This report discusses OHK's work with domestic workers from 2004 to 2015, managed by its Urban Livelihood Programme Team. It highlights the programme's significant outcomes and impacts in collaboration with its partners in areas including empowerment, the establishment of mutual support networks and policy advocacy. In this report, OHK aims to share its good practices, impacts as well as challenges encountered with Oxfam Confederation as well as organisations and individuals who are interested in OHK's work in this area.

This is a desk review report based on project documentations including the Urban Livelihood Programme's latest strategic plan, evaluation reports, as well as laws and policy reviews that pertain to domestic work.

This report is divided into five parts: Part I covers background information on the domestic service sector; Part II introduces OHK's theory of change in this programme; Part III discusses OHK's Programme approaches, outcomes and impacts; Part IV presents OHK's good practices and lessons learnt; and Part V offers recommendations for its future work.

## Strategic Objectives of Domestic Workers Programme

**Objective 1:** To strengthen the capacity of domestic workers to protect their rights, and build a mutual support network among them through training, services and other activities

**Objective 2:** To help the public understand and recognise the value of domestic work through public education

**Objective 3:** To improve the legal protection of domestic workers through policy advocacy

## Outcomes and Impacts

OHK's work to empower domestic workers and establish mutual support networks have contributed to various positive outcomes and impacts. For instance, the lives of domestic workers were enriched, and their job skills and ability to protect their labour rights were enhanced. Furthermore, domestic workers' awareness of their legal rights was raised and their legal literacy was improved; significant number of core members was also nurtured and support networks among domestic workers were established. Together

with OHK's partners, domestic workers were able to establish a trade union, and they learnt to speak up through cultural activities and cultural groups.

Through OHK's policy advocacy and public campaign efforts, both the public and scholars on labour law came to have better understanding on the challenges domestic workers face, and domestic workers were empowered through participating in OHK and its partners' advocacy efforts. Standardised employment contracts for domestic workers in Beijing were also enforced, while, through OHK and its partners' advocacy efforts, progress was made with regard to legislation at the municipal level. At the national level, legislation of domestic workers' labour rights was incorporated into the agenda of government policy plan. Also, partners contributed to the formulation of the International Labour Organization convention in protecting the rights of domestic workers.

OHK also nurtured new NGOs and strengthened their capacity based on its partner development strategies. OHK further expanded its academic network and resources in relation to the labour rights protection of domestic workers.

## Good Practices and Lessons Learnt

Much programme experience was gained through this programme and there were also lessons learnt. For instance, empowerment, participation, and the voices of domestic workers were essential to making progress, and it was important to bring a rights-based perspective into advocacy work. Moreover, the integration of community work and policy advocacy work was essential, as was the empowerment of domestic workers when carrying out public campaigns. OHK also learnt that timing was crucial to effective advocacy work, while developing partners' capacity at every stage of a programme has proven highly important. All of these factors have contributed to the success of the programme.

The programme was not without challenges though. OHK found it difficult to set up cooperatives as related legislation only applied to rural areas but not cities, for example. Furthermore, limited academic resources and inadequate communication between academics and frontline community service providers proved to be a challenge. The ways in which OHK could carry out its advocacy work were restricted and there was a lack of NGOs that targeted domestic workers.

## Going Forward

Based on the above experience, OHK put forth several recommendations for its future work. These include recruiting more partners and building their capacity; looking for timely and appropriate opportunities for policy advocacy; strengthening public campaign efforts and sharing programme experience within Oxfam Confederation.

OHK and its partners have achieved positive outcomes over the past 10 years and have built a good foundation in this area. OHK believes that together with the community, partners and all stakeholders, domestic workers' rights can be better protected and a more conducive environment can be created for domestic workers to thrive.

## Introduction

China has become the country with the largest number of domestic workers – more than 20 million – who are mostly women. Despite their hard work, they are often excluded from the protection of labour laws. Female domestic workers are one of the most marginalised group among rural migrant workers.

Oxfam Hong Kong (OHK) began projects on domestic workers in mainland China in 2002. The projects aim to improve the living conditions of domestic workers through empowerment and advocacy work of domestic worker groups. In this report, OHK aims to share its experience, the impacts and challenges of its programme with Oxfam International, its affiliates, as well as organisations and individuals who are interested in OHK's work in this area.

This report is divided into five parts: Part I covers background information on the domestic service sector; Part II introduces the theory of change of OHK's domestic workers' programme; Part III discusses the programme outcomes and impacts; Part IV presents OHK's good practices and lessons learnt; and Part V offers recommendations.

This is a desk review report based on project documentations including the Urban Livelihood Programme's latest strategic plan; the latest review report on this strategic plan; project proposals, progress reports and evaluation reports over the years; as well as regular project monitoring records and laws and policy reviews that pertain to domestic workers related law and policy reviews.

## Part I. Background Information on Domestic Service Sector in Mainland China

### 1 Statistics and Figures

Domestic service is a paid provision of services to meet household needs based on market demand. Services include taking care of the elderly, children, pregnant women, people with illnesses and disabilities, as well as routine housework. Domestic workers may work full time or part time, living with the employer household or not.

The Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security (MOHRSS) promulgated the 'National Occupational Standards of Domestic Workers' in 2000, which recognised domestic service as an occupation. The domestic service sector has developed rapidly in recent years. According to conservative estimates in 2013, there were about 652,000 domestic service companies and around 21.62 million domestic workers; these figures are showing a fast-growing trend.

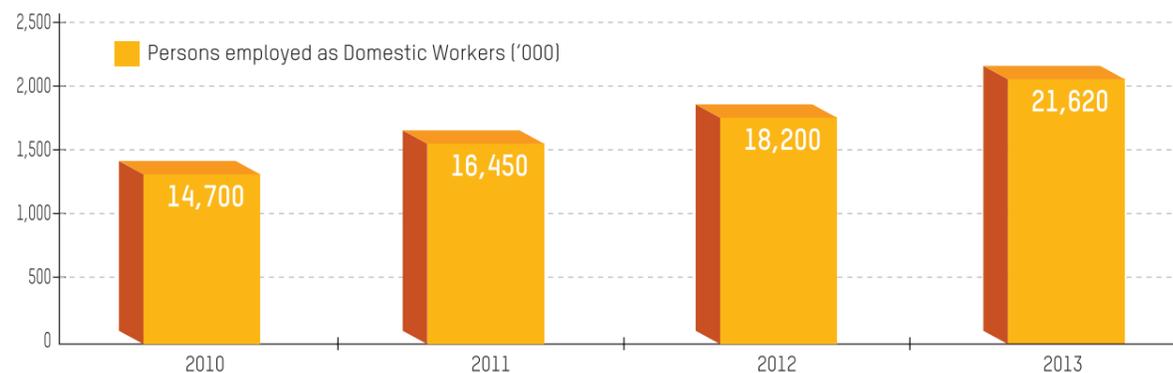


Figure 1: Working Population in Domestic Service Sector in Mainland China

Persons employed as domestic workers are mainly comprised of laid-off urban workers and rural migrants.<sup>1</sup> Ninety per cent of domestic workers are women between the ages of 16 and 48, while the majority of these workers are between the ages of 30 and 40.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Key Challenges

Compared to other services, domestic work is considered informal work for several reasons. Domestic workers are often called ‘babysitters’ or ‘nannies’ in the households of their employers, so their status as employees is often downplayed and are seen as ‘informal services providers’.

Moreover, they are not protected by labour laws as domestic service companies and domestic workers are in an agent-service provider relationship but not in an employer-employee relationship. Domestic workers are not legally recognised as employees, so they are not entitled to the social

insurance and occupational protection as other employees.

Although the government recognises domestic service as an occupation, its occupational standards, and regulations are incomprehensive. Female rural migrants particularly lack social support networks. As many domestic workers work in the homes of their employers and have relatively weak social resources and social support, they often feel isolated, lonely or helpless. Sexual harassment is another threat to female domestic workers as the working place is private.

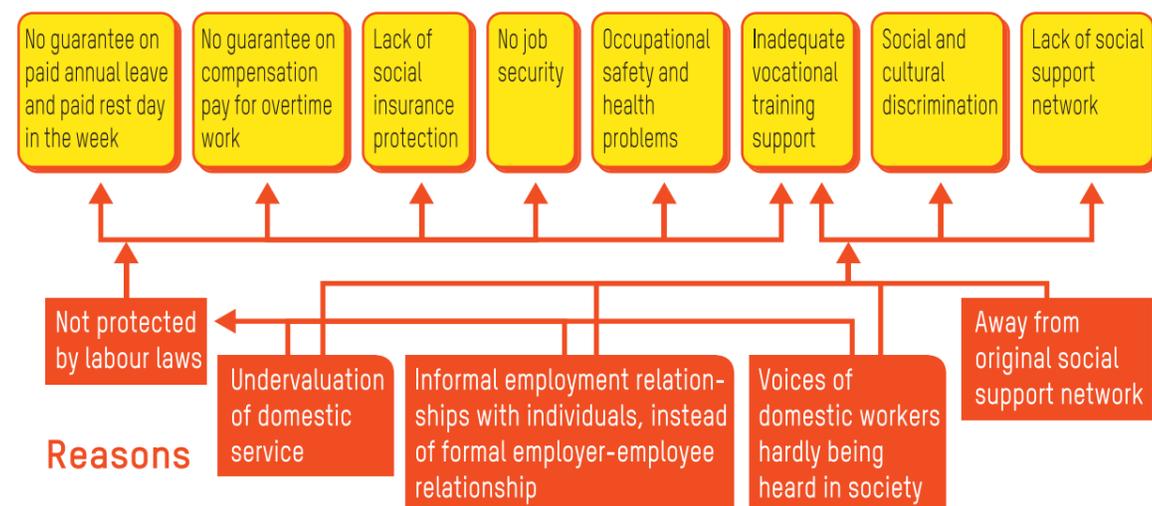


Figure 2: Violations and Abuses Domestic Workers Face

<sup>1</sup> China Industry Insight Network. (2014, October 2). Analysis of Domestic Service Sector Development in China. Retrieved from <http://www.51report.com/article/3051737.html>  
<sup>2</sup> ILO. (2009). Prevent trafficking, Protect the rights and interests of domestic workers, the Promote gender equality and decent employment Project Report: Overview of domestic service sector in China (Rep.).

## 3 National and International Laws and Policies on Domestic Workers

China’s Constitution provides for safeguards of labour rights. Unfortunately, domestic workers are not protected by the ‘labour laws’. Labour protection for domestic workers is missing from national laws, regulations and local policies. Once domestic workers have disputes with employers or domestic service companies, they can only apply civil law general provisions to their cases. As such, whenever legal dispute happens, it is very difficult for domestic workers to defend their rights.

At the national policy level, the State Council issued the ‘Guidance on the Development of the Domestic Service Sector’ ([2010] No. 43), which points out the need to protect the legal rights of domestic workers and regulate the relationship among domestic service companies, employing families and domestic workers, to secure the remuneration of domestic workers and to allow for a flexible way for domestic workers to obtain social insurance. Through these guidelines, the State Council set up several measures to protect the rights of domestic workers. Later, MOHRSS discussed the ‘Domestic Service Labour Regulations’ – which is only a draft and has not been finalised yet – and the

Ministry of Commerce announced ‘Domestic Service Sector Interim Measures’ in 2012. Some areas, such as Shenzhen, Changchun, Zhengzhou and Chengdu cities, as well as Jiangsu and Liaoning provinces, have also introduced their own local domestic service sector measures.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned policies mainly regulate the development of the domestic service sector and do not resolve the risks and difficulties faced by domestic workers who are involved in informal employment.

Internationally, domestic workers have gradually gained recognition for their rights to decent work. After discussions among members of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) over the years, the International Labour Conference (ILC), which held its hundredth session in Geneva on June 16, 2011, adopted the Domestic Workers Convention and Recommendation (Convention No. 189 and Recommendation No. 201), providing guidance for the protection of rights of domestic workers. As of October 2015, 22 countries have signed the Convention, but China has not.

## Part II. OHK’s Domestic Workers Programme – Theory of Change

### 1 Strategic Objectives of the Domestic Workers Programme

<b>Objective 1</b>	To strengthen the capacity of domestic workers to protect their rights, and build a mutual support network among them through training, services and other activities
<b>Objective 2</b>	To help the public understand and recognise the value of domestic workers through public education
<b>Objective 3</b>	To improve the legal protection of domestic workers through policy advocacy

## 2 Programme Strategies

OHK believes that we must engage our target communities in order to bring effective and sustainable change to policies and their living environment. The table below describes how OHK establishes close relationships with different target groups and how we empower them through a participatory approach.

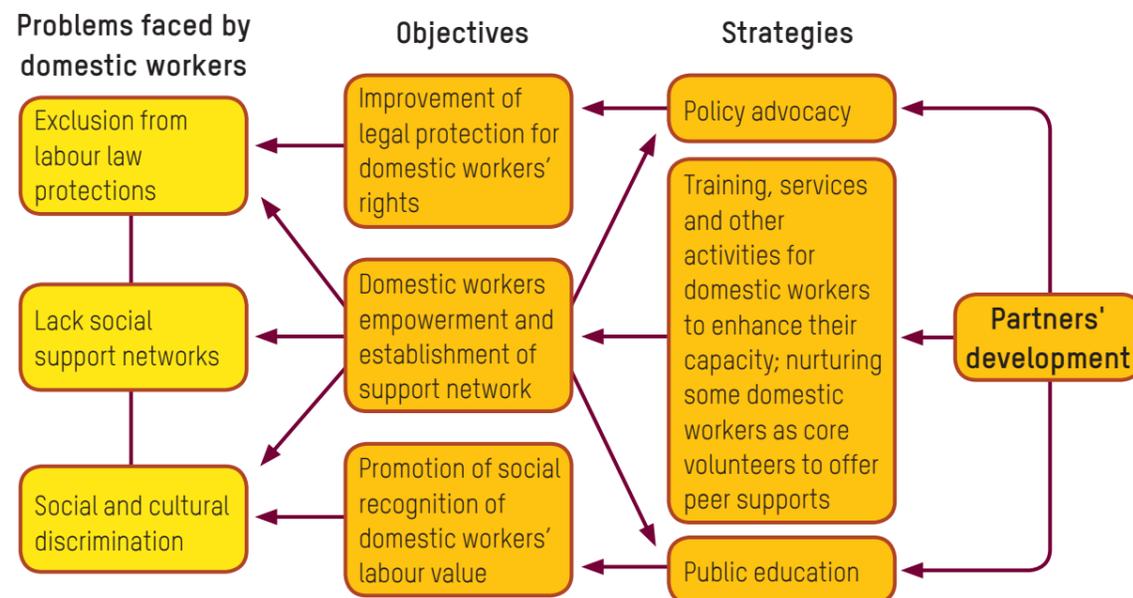


Figure 3: Domestic Workers Programme - Theory of Change

### 2.1 Provision of Training and Services as well as Building Social Support Networks for Domestic Workers

Training and service provisions directly support domestic workers in their struggles in cities. OHK's programme puts emphasis on empowering domestic workers. Through collective discussions and decision making as well as sharing leadership roles among active members in workers' groups, the programme fostered mutual support among domestic workers. Domestic workers may set up their autonomous organisation when appropriate.

### 2.2 Policy Advocacy

Advocating for legislation and policy changes are important strategies to improve legal protection for domestic workers. Considering the context of China, advocacy is conducted in multiple ways, including research, case studies and press releases; media campaigns to draw public attention on issues concerning domestic workers; policy

advocacy seminars involving NGOs, community representatives, academics and government officials; and policy proposal submissions through scholars, the China's National People's Congress (NPC)/Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) representatives to relevant government departments. During the advocacy process, we stress on working with NGOs and academics, and making domestic workers' voices heard.

Since national legislation for protecting the rights of domestic workers is a lengthy process, all of OHK's advocacy projects set progressive objectives in different phases including the promotion of standardised contracts, local legislation advocacy, research and advocacy of legislation on specific issues such as occupational injuries.

### 2.3 Public Education

The public at large has little knowledge and shows little concern about the problems domestic workers face. Changing the public's perception and enhancing their understanding is therefore of primary importance in order to create a fair and just environment for all domestic workers.

The programme increases public awareness regarding the vulnerabilities of domestic workers through thematic activities, dramas/skits, press releases, etc. These initiatives not only reduce social and cultural discrimination against domestic workers, but also strengthen the sense of community and mutual support among domestic workers and help constitute favourable conditions for policy advocacy.

### 2.4 Partners' Development

OHK always carries out programmes with local partners to conduct community, research and advocacy work. Therefore, identifying partner organisations and building up their capacity are essential to achieving programme objectives. OHK not only cooperates with existing partners but also nurtures new NGOs partners and academics whose work is relevant to OHK's. Apart from supporting projects directly benefiting domestic workers, the programme also funds staff training, organisational development and the networking of partner organisations.

## Part III. Programme Approaches, Outcomes and Impacts

The programme focuses on building awareness and the capacity of domestic workers, enabling them to be recognised by society and protect their own rights. We equipped domestic workers with better skills through training and received support through mutual help networks. With assistance from the programme, domestic workers gained greater confidence and self-autonomy. Furthermore, they voiced out their needs through social participation and dialogue, urging the government, employers, and domestic service companies to respect their labour values and rights. While working on domestic workers empowerment, we also involved scholars to do research on the situation, needs and labour rights of domestic workers to formulate and propose policy advice to the government. With research from scholars, the government gradually realised the importance of recognising and protecting domestic workers, and provided feasible solutions through improving related policies and local ordinances.

## 1 Domestic Workers' Empowerment and Mutual Support Network

OHK established partnerships with a number of domestic worker groups between 2004 and 2015, supporting six partners in projects like developing domestic workers' mutual support networks, labour rights protection and organisational development. In total, over US\$ 1,070,000 was allocated to this area of projects. For details, please refer to the partner/project list in the appendix.

### 1.1 Approaches

Based on previous outreach activities and research findings, partners set project objectives according to characteristics of different target groups to respond to their specific needs and to allocate project resources in a relevant and efficient manner. OHK's partners focus on the empowerment of domestic workers, nurturing of workers' leaders and workers' own mutual help organisations. On that basis, OHK's partners built up and reconstructed the social support network of domestic workers.

Below is a selection of projects which are representative of OHK's work in terms of their specific contexts and partners.

### 1.1.1 Reconstructing Support Networks for Urban Laid-off Female Workers: Supporting Marginalised Female Workers in Xi'an City

#### 1.1.1.1 Xi'an Local Domestic Workers

Due to their low education levels, laid-off female workers can only find informal employment, particularly domestic service. Although there are no official statistics on this, it is estimated that an approximate 60 to 70 per cent of female laid-off workers entered the domestic service sector.

To address these situations, the Center for Women's Development and Rights of Northwestern Polytechnical University in Xi'an City worked with the Employment Information Centre of Xi'an Union Federation, Employment Guidance Centre of Xi'an Women Federation and Employment Service Centre of Xi'an Women Federation, to conduct a project on building a support network for marginalised female workers between 2002 and 2006.

#### 1.1.1.2 Community Work: Recognition of the Value of Labour and the Reconstruction of Support Networks

This target group was previously factory workers of state-owned enterprises or collective enterprises, in which a comprehensive support system was institutionalised, with supports from

trade union, the employee community in factory and informal networks. However, after being laid off, workers did not get much support from their own unions and work units. Due to the rigidity of institutions, even they were excluded from the support system. Therefore, reconstructing the support system for them and increasing their sense of autonomy and occupational recognition, which was negatively affected by their experience of being laid off, became the priority and ultimate goal of the projects.

Comparatively speaking, domestic work, in terms of labour protection, social status and influence, is sufficiently inferior to their previous jobs, which were decent and secure. These discrepancies became obstacles for laid-off female workers as it was difficult for them to build up a normal self- and occupational identity. In response to this dilemma, OHK together with its partners started rebuilding a social support network for domestic workers through the project while establishing their professional and community identity through training, peer support and nurturing domestic workers' mutual help organisations.

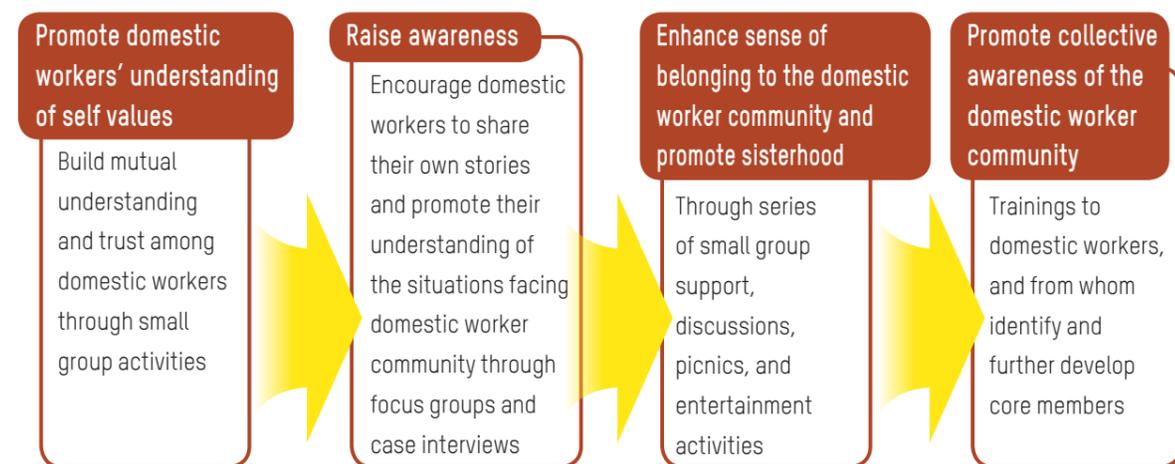


Figure 4: Process of Building Support Network and Empowering Workers



Figure 5: Exercising the Right to Association — Establishment of Xi'an Domestic Workers' Union

*Before meeting the sisters of the XDWU, I was very pessimistic and even had suicidal thoughts. Only after the help and encouragement of these sisters, both financially and emotionally, I have been able to move on step by step. Without our domestic workers' union, I wouldn't have become who I am today.*

*I was left with nothing after my divorce. I wanted to go back to my parents' home but the door was locked. I asked my sister for the key, but she said she didn't know who kept it. Perhaps she just didn't dare to give it to me!*

*'Every family has its problems. Although your family was unresponsive, you should still pry open their doors and live there,' my classmates said. Following their suggestion and having no other way out, I pried open the door of my house. However, when I went inside, it was empty.*

*When neighbours saw me take my baby home, they gave me their own deck and a long bench. A home for my baby was set up at last. Blankets were given by sisters in the union.*

*One night, when it was raining heavily outside, my baby and I were woken up by a terrible noise at around four o'clock. I realised that one of the walls of my house had collapsed. Although I am a cheerful person, I felt very helpless at that time and I just sat by the window crying even though I knew crying wouldn't solve any problems.*

*At seven o'clock that morning, I called the president and sisters of the XDWU. They immediately came to me, saying that this old house was too old to live in. They also took time off from work to help me seek assistance from provincial and municipal authorities, and helped me financially. At last, they helped me rebuild the wall of my house.*

**By Sister Han, a union member of the XDWU**

**— Extracted from the article 'Sisterhood' in the Xi'an chapter of the publication 'Viola philippica in full bloom—an oral history of domestic workers'**

Since domestic workers are primarily laid-off female workers who used to rely on their employment units to establish their social support networks, this project's core strategy of establishing autonomous organisation among domestic workers was through a trade union. The project then carried out a series of activities including skills trainings, network building, nurturing of partner organisations, and advocacy work.

The XDWU was officially set up in 2004. It was the first domestic workers' union in China,

established and managed by domestic workers. The union was established with the following process. Through training and building up of networks, a group of core members were identified among the union members. Then these core members were facilitated to participate in the daily operations of the union, in which their communication skills were raised. Trainings were offered to these core members so that they could learn how to set the objectives, strategize, and plan the work for the union. They then managed to plan and deliver union

activities independently. By the end of the project, the union elected core members through a general election, who were able to manage daily operations – having their own organisations established and core members developed.

For domestic worker groups, there is still a long road ahead to improve their status and defend their labour rights. However, with support of the social network mentioned above, they have had significant changes, including improved recognition of the value of their work as domestic helper as well as of the entire domestic workers' community. They also have developed exchange platforms and sisterhood. Their psychological and physical health has been enhanced and they have greater hope for the future. All these are crucial foundations for further awareness raising on labour rights and gender equality. The establishment of trade unions also empowers domestic workers through organisational protection. The paid membership of the XDWU grew from 82 in 2004, when it was founded, to 896 in 2015. To better connect members and utilise the potential of the core members, the XDWU even set up regional branches in five districts according to the geographic features of cities. Each regional branch has a committee to carry out union activities in domestic workers' neighbourhoods and to strengthen communication with its members.

Although the laid-off female workers are gradually moving into retirement and leaving the domestic service sector now, the population of migrant domestic workers is increasing within the XDWU. As of 2015, nearly 60 per cent of the XDWU's members were rural migrants.

### 1.1.2 Support Network for Rural Migrant Workers in the Domestic Service Sector in Beijing — Migrant Women's Club (MWC)

OHK began collaborating with the MWC on its migrant female workers empowerment project since 2002, and the project shifted its focus to domestic workers in 2005. Between 2005 and 2015, the MWC established a comprehensive domestic worker services and support system through the provision of services enhancing legal protection, building up networks, core member training, organisational development and so on.

#### 1.1.2.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Domestic Workers in Beijing

Beijing, as the capital of China and the focal point of all kinds of resources, has a higher proportion of middle-class families. The domestic service sector in Beijing began in the late 1970s and developed rapidly in the 1980s and 1990s. Since 2010, the total number of domestic workers in Beijing remained at over 400,000. Most (98%) domestic workers in Beijing are women. They are mostly married, middle-aged and less educated (the educational attainment of over 60 per cent were below junior secondary school)<sup>3</sup>. Over 90% of domestic workers in Beijing are non-local residents, and are often rural-to-urban migrants.

<sup>3</sup> Yao, D., Zhang, L., & Zou, W. (2014). Blue book of rural women development in China: Report on development of rural-to-urban female migrants (2014). Social Science Academic Press.

#### 1.1.2.2 Basic Services, Drama Workshops, and Core Member Training: Establishment of Support Networks

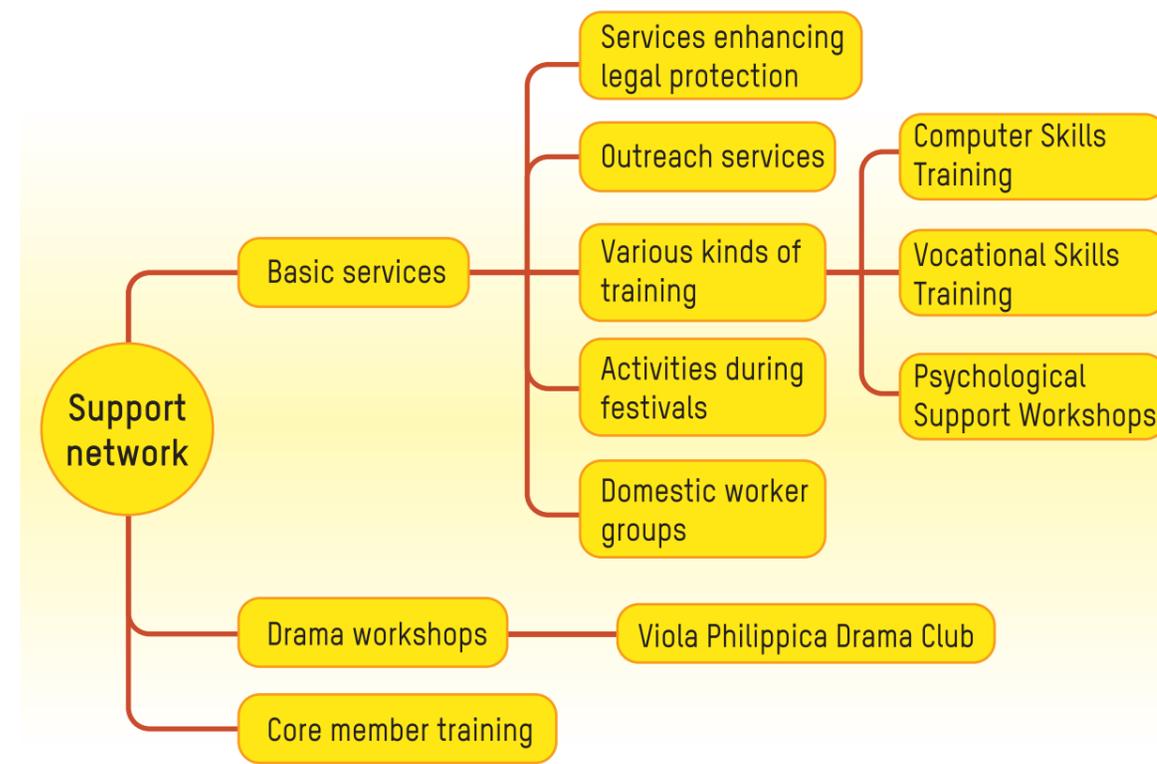


Figure 6: Establishing Support Networks

#### Services for enhancing legal protection to domestic workers

MWC had started launching services since 2002 to address labour rights violations faced by migrant female workers who were mostly domestic workers. These supportive services were delivered mainly through domestic workers' calls to MWC's hotline and face-to-face consultations, as well as by providing legal aid service to support domestic workers in some special court cases. MWC also organises various kinds of activities to help domestic workers better understand their rights and how to protect themselves.

With the service delivery and legal aid court cases, MWC can better understand the various legal problems domestic workers face and the limitations in the current legal system. Based on the consolidation of these court cases, MWC holds various kinds of conferences on advocating better legal protection on domestic workers' rights.

#### Outreach services

In order to reach out domestic workers, understand their needs and offering them services, MWC pays regular visits to domestic service agencies and weekly visits to hospitals (which grants health

certificate to domestic workers). During these visits, MWC distributes to domestic workers leaflets about their agency and on legal protections entitled by domestic workers.

#### Training

Training sessions were provided with the content designed basing on the needs expressed by domestic workers, including psychological support, communication skills, etiquette, health knowledge and computer skills. For example, the ongoing computer training sessions that have been conducted since 2008 were updated to cover job hunting skills using the internet and smartphones, relevant job skills and knowledge as well as daily communication skills. These training sessions on one hand helped improve domestic workers' technical and job searching skills, and on the other hand, enabled them to better connect with the families they worked for and with the society.

#### Domestic Workers' Gatherings

Due to job nature, domestic workers often get very limited rest time. However, during holidays, employers usually let domestic workers rest to avoid paying overtime compensation. As such, OHK's

partners organise monthly gatherings for these workers during holidays to relieve their work stress and develop cohesion within the domestic workers group.

#### Domestic Worker Groups and Support Networks

At the beginning, a domestic workers' group was established for sharing their work experiences and difficulties. Mutual support was the key element in the group activities. Later on it evolved to a mutual

support network with various domestic workers' groups such as: mutual help group of domestic workers who are single parents, interest groups in photography or in cultural activities, etc.

This group work approach encourages domestic workers to participate and help one another. The network has been built up, offering support to domestic workers.

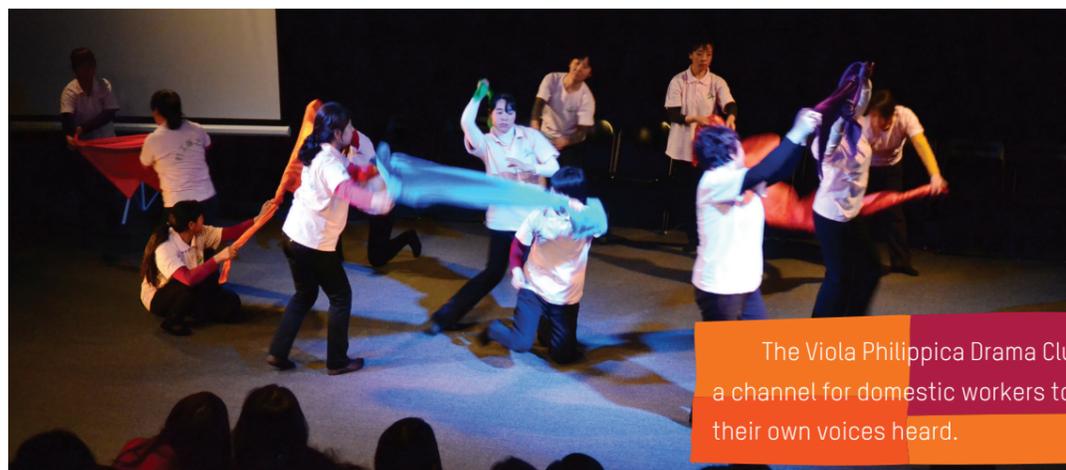
*'The MWC feels like home and warms my heart. It is a place where I can rest during difficult times. I learnt a lot about the law from the legal seminar organised by the MWC. My writing was even published in the MWC's newsletter. I was recognised and I feel happy. I am very happy to meet more domestic worker sisters through MWC activities,' said Jiang Xiuhua, a domestic worker.*

#### Viola Philippica Drama Club

MWC, in collaboration with Professor Zhao Zhiyong and his students from the Central Academy of Drama, held a drama workshop for domestic workers and eventually set up the Viola Philippica Drama Club. Members of the drama club wrote their own scripts based on the daily lives of domestic workers. They learnt vocal, body movement and so on during training sessions. Apart from being a platform for theatrical training, the drama club was also a channel for domestic workers to make their own voices heard. Through these activities, domestic workers became more confident about speaking up, raising public awareness and interacting with different organisations such as Female Network Hope Home and New Workers Art Troupe.

*From the point of view of Wang Shuhua, a drama club member, the Viola Philippica Drama Club became her home. Wang Shuhua, a 48-year-old woman from Liaoning province, has been working in Beijing as a domestic worker since 2003. Before joining the drama club, she spent her spare time on chatting with her co-workers, shopping and so on. Since joining the drama club, Wang Shuhua has been taking drama lessons, despite having to commute for more than an hour. 'Here, you can chat and act with other sisters. Life becomes much more fulfilling. The drama club is like home,' said Wang Shuhua.*

*—extracted from the web report 'Domestic workers building up the "Viola Philippica" Drama Club', ACFTU (Zhong Gong Wang)*



The Viola Philippica Drama Club was a channel for domestic workers to make their own voices heard.

#### Training Core Members

All activities for domestic workers are also a process for identifying and nurturing core members. The most effective way to nurture core members is to organise long-term activities such as long-term drama workshops and long-term computer training sessions. Through drama workshops, many core members were trained up and became the important members of the MWC. Core members not only participated in the activities of the MWC, but also played host and invited other domestic workers to join activities.

Computer workshops also increased participants' self-confidence and their sense of belonging to the MWC. After learning about the scope of work of the MWC, some students sought help from the MWC, or became core members. They actively participated and assisted in the MWC's services and helped promote the club.

MWC also mobilised students and domestic workers to conduct these outreach services as volunteers. During the outreach service delivery process, MWC further supported these domestic worker volunteers to become core members.

#### 'Home Care Service of Beijing Rural Women' and the Union

MWC supported the establishment of the Home Care Service of Beijing Rural Women (hereafter Home Care Service), which used to be a mutual support group for domestic workers, and later developed into a cooperative in 2009. In 2010, the Home Care Service successfully registered as a non-profit making private unit. It took over a domestic service company and became a district-level service agency. It also provided home care apartment services for the elderly as a project funded by the Dongcheng District Civil Affairs Bureau. Home Care Service employed and trained up domestic workers to work in this elderly hostel and they upheld the beliefs of respect, equality and understanding towards domestic workers. Home Care Service opened some training opportunities from this government funded project to all domestic workers. Training sessions included caring work for elderly and children,

domestic workers related psychological support and legal protection. In addition, they organised seminars for domestic workers to help relieve work-related stress, solve work problems and exchange job experiences. Home Care Service also bridged the communication gap between domestic workers and employers through activities that brought both parties together, publishing an employer's guide and so on.

Home Care Service established a domestic workers' trade union in 2011. Many domestic workers eagerly joined the union. A union committee was formed through a democratic election in a general members' meeting.

Union members were invited to join a variety of training programmes, especially in awareness raising activities on rights protection. The union is another platform to serve the union members as well as to seek higher level unions' support and other resources in the society.



Figure 7: Community Development Work Mechanism of Beijing Migrant Women's Club

### 1.1.3 Working with Domestic Workers in the Community — the Jinan Gichon Social Service Center for Community (the Gichon Centre)

DHK has been collaborating with the Gichon Centre since 2010 and is carrying out projects to meet the needs of domestic workers in Jinan City.

#### 1.1.3.1 Socio-demographic Characteristic of Domestic Workers in Jinan City

In Jinan, more than 90 per cent of domestic workers are women, mostly between 30 and 55 years old, married, and have low educational attainment (i.e. primary school or below). Meanwhile, the demographic structure of domestic workers has been changing from being mostly made up of urban laid-off women to now including women from suburban areas, who are left with no or little land, as well as rural women migrants.

The Gichon Centre carries out activities in the Dajiangou Village of Shiliulihe Street in Jinan, where many domestic workers live. According to incomplete statistics provided by the Women's Commission in the village, the current population of the village stands at about 20,000. More than 80 per cent of women of working age – about 3,000 – were serving or had served as domestic workers before. These domestic workers were involved in full-time domestic work, part-time or hourly-paid cleaning work.

#### 1.1.3.2 Shifting from an Outreach Model to a Community-based Model

##### ● Domestic Workers Project in Jinan

The Gichon Centre launched outreach services at the areas clustered with people offering/ seeking causal jobs and at domestic service companies so as to reach out domestic helpers and related stakeholders and to understand the living conditions and demands of domestic workers. The Gichon Centre's project team has been working with three casual worker job agencies in Jinan and more than 50 domestic service companies, and carried out research on domestic workers, legal knowledge dissemination, legal assistance, and published newsletters on domestic workers.

Following up on the above outreach work, the Gichon Centre developed specific female worker group activities, including discussion groups on legal knowledge, labour rights, training workshops such as preventing and handling legal disputes and focus groups to help female domestic workers understand their employment contracts. These activities were mainly conducted adjacent to job agencies for causal workers and in community centres.

Staff at the Gichon Centre had realised from the outreaching process that many domestic workers lived in Dajiangou Village. The project started focusing on community services in this village in

2012. After exploring children's services, community care supermarket and so on, the project developed interest groups, such as computer classes and handicraft workshops, for women workers as an entry point to gather women workers and to create a platform for mutual support.

Building on the established interest groups, the Gichon Centre facilitated the organising work of women workers and encouraged their participation. With these efforts, volunteers were involved in the administrative work of the computer classes. In the cultural activities group and the handicrafts group, core members already identified who had been launching the group activities. In community activities and sharing sessions on domestic work, some domestic workers gradually increased their participation from supporting some simple tasks to designing and leading the events.

##### ● Fully Mobilising Social Resources through Integration of Other Projects

The Gichon Centre sought resources from other funders to expand its work related to domestic

workers. The Gichon Centre reached an agreement with the District's Women's Federation to collaborate with Shizhong District Integrated Migrant Worker Services Centre to offer legal assistance, career guidance and resources referrals for women workers. The Gichon Centre also worked with the Huaiyin District Women's Federation, Women's Federation's Smart House Manager System and Huaiyin District Sunshine Sister Company to extend its services to female domestic workers, which mainly involved documenting court cases of domestic workers and employment services.

### 1.1.4 English Classes and Life Care Model: Beijing Jin Lin Social Service Centre

#### 1.1.4.1 Socio-demographic characteristics of domestic workers

When Beijing Jin Lin Social Service Centre started its community work in Kangying community, Sunhe Township in Chaoyang District in July 2010, they discovered that domestic workers there were mainly rural migrant women or migrant wives of Beijing residents aged between 40 and 55. These



The Gichon Centre developed interest groups, such as handicraft workshops to gather women workers and create a platform for their mutual support.

domestic workers mainly worked for foreign families, but their greatest difficulty was the language barrier. Due to the language barrier, domestic workers were poorly remunerated and had difficulties defending their rights when disputes occurred.

#### 1.1.4.2 English Classes as an Entry Point for Establishing Support Network

Regarding the practical needs of domestic workers, Beijing Jin Lin Social Service Centre offered English classes to domestic workers as a way to build a mutual support network. The English classes further helped domestic workers beyond their language skills. For instance, it helped expand their resource networks, boosted their confidence and improved communication among them, enabling them to better adapt and integrate into their communities. The senior trainees of the classes mentored new students, encouraging and educating them to engage with other domestic workers and to participate in social affairs.

Through participating in maintaining and managing this support network, the domestic workers' self-organising abilities were enhanced. For example, through managing the class funds by the domestic helpers themselves, their feeling of autonomy and willingness to serve others increased.

Meanwhile, the class fund managing committee members also involved in managing the affairs of the class and the organisation, which raised their capacities and awareness in providing services. With public community platform, the project mobilised the domestic workers to participate in public affairs so as to increase their civic participation and capacity.

Beijing Jin Lin Social Service Centre also paid efforts to understand the families of domestic workers. They were able to gain the trust of domestic workers' family members, visit them, learn about domestic workers' living conditions, and invite the family members to participate in class activities and community activities so that the family members could understand the Centre more and support the domestic workers to join the activities of the Centre.

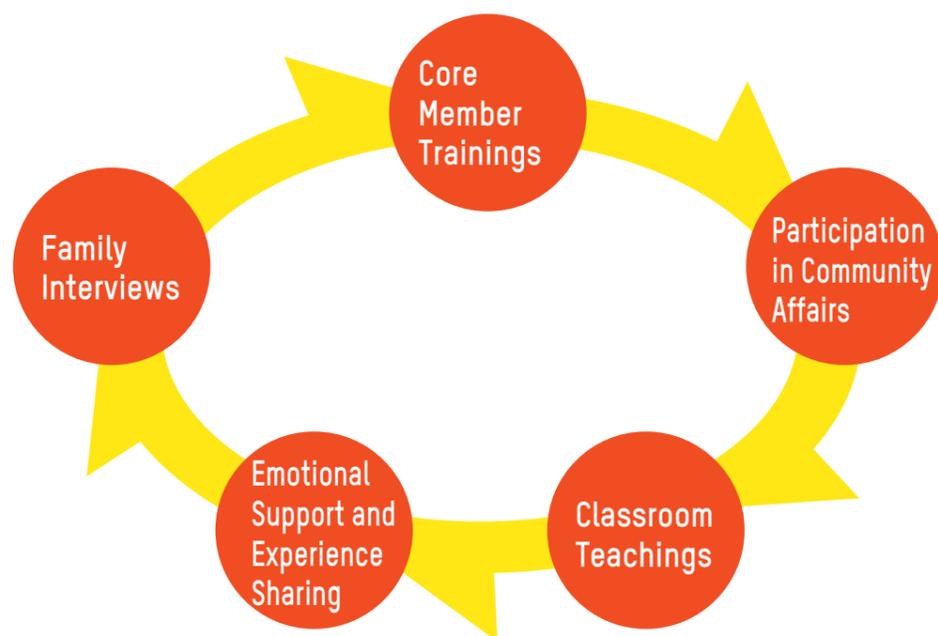


Figure 8 Project Strategies of Beijing Jin Lin Social Service Centre

## 1.2 Outcomes and Impacts of Empowerment and Establishment of Mutual Support Network

### 1.2.1 Lives of Domestic Workers Enriched, Job Skills and Ability to Protect their Labour Rights Enhanced

To enhance domestic workers' job skills and ability to protect themselves, the Gichon Centre carried out numerous outreaching activities and training programmes.

Between 2011 and 2015, around 7,000 to 10,000 domestic workers were reached annually through outreach and publicity activities in the community. Since 2004, the Gichon Centre has provided computer training sessions to over 500 domestic workers, English classes to 100 participants and other kinds of training and seminars to more than 5,000 people (gross count).

*'I learnt that the law can protect people. It is a weapon. It supports me', Li Xiaojun told the reporter of 'Half Sky', a CCTV programme, after she had received legal assistance from MWC. During the legal assistance process, the MWC has been continuously receiving thank-you banners from their beneficiaries, who expressed gratitude and messages such as, 'The MWC is committed to legal rights protection and helping the weak', and 'Members of the MWC are dedicated, righteous and, provide selfless assistance.'*

Since 2004, partners in Beijing, Xi'an and Jinan cities have organised legal trainings and talks for over 1,000 people (gross count), while other beneficiaries have been reached through outreach activities.

### 1.2.2 Domestic Workers' Awareness of their Legal Rights was Raised and their Legal Literacy Improved

Since 2004, the MWC has offered legal consultations to a total of 1,187 people and provided legal aid service to 65 people, effectively defended the legal rights of domestic workers. According to a survey conducted among domestic workers in 2008, 46 per cent of respondents revealed that the MWC's legal aid offered the greatest support to them among the other services provided by MWC. When asked about how the services brought change to their lives, some respondents said that the free legal assistance resolved the difficulties they were facing, and helped them realise that they were not alone. It also gave them more confidence and courage to continue on in their lives.

### 1.2.3 A Group of Community Core Members Nurtured and Support Networks within Communities Established

Through OHK's partners' activities and services, and by training core members, domestic workers were able to take the lead, share what they learnt with their fellow workers, encourage mutual support within their communities and expand domestic workers' support networks.

*Hu Cai-xia got to know about the MWC through the core members of the domestic workers' community. 'Due to the isolating environment of my job, my life is like a pool of stagnant water. There was no sunshine, no colour, no happiness, no hope; not until I met Hongxian (a member of the MWC) by chance and joined a domestic workers' activity at the Shuang Xiu Park. I was very excited, I felt like I was at home. I felt just like a bird in cage that had finally discovered a blue sky of its own', wrote Cai-xia in an article that was published in the MWC's newsletter.*

### 1.2.4 Domestic Workers able to Establish a Trade Union

In September 2004, a grassroots group under the 'Building Support Networks for Marginalised Women Workers in Xi'an project' helped establish the Xi'an Domestic Workers' Union, which was the first trade union of domestic workers independent of domestic service companies in mainland China.

When the trade union was first set up, there were 82 members who were elected to a committee consisting of a president, vice president, and committee members. As of December 2015, there were 896 members who joined the Xi'an Domestic Workers Union.

Through the trade union, domestic workers better understood and learnt to protect their rights. Moreover, they exercised their right to association, learnt how to solve problems through the union. With the support of the union, the committee members learnt about seeking other resources in the society and have made progress and now enjoy more rights. These include winning the first-time free obstetrics check up services, medical care for basic treatment and subsidies for female workers for Chinese New Year through government resources.

The establishment of a domestic workers' trade union was groundbreaking and built up a more representative organisation for domestic workers. Among other things, it helped domestic workers

more actively participate in their communities, raised their awareness of their legal and labour rights, and cultivated an awareness of being able to come together collectively to form labour groups. It also established domestic workers' professional image, demonstrated their value to and helped gain the respect of society.

### 1.2.5 Communities Learnt to Speak Up through Cultural Activities and Cultural Groups

Cultural activities enabled domestic workers to connect to each other through the formation of cultural groups such as the Viola Philippica Drama Club. The project not only enriched domestic workers' lives and free time, but also became a platform for domestic workers to speak up through cultural activities or performances.

For example, the domestic workers of the MWC's Viola Philippica Drama Club shared their lives in their drama pieces, including 'Waiting for Flowers Blossom', 'Domestic Workers in the New Era', and 'Can't be Clearly Expressed'. The drama club also performed at regular gatherings organised by the MWC, other organisations' activities as well as at professional drama festivals. The drama club's professional drama stage performances, which spoke of the lives of domestic workers, were widely reported by mainstream media. This helped domestic workers interact more with the public and increased their understanding towards domestic workers.



The Xi'an Domestic Workers' Union organised training to its core members to raise awareness of self-management.

## 2 Policy Advocacy and Public Campaigns

Since 2005, OHK has supported seven partners to do influencing projects that focus on policy advocacy, public campaign and community-based influencing work, with a total budget of US\$ 400,000. For the details, please refer to the partner/project list in the appendix.

### 2.1 Main Advocacy Work

OHK's advocacy work with regard to domestic workers can be classified into two types. The first type involves conducting situational studies on domestic workers and carrying out advocacy work in collaboration with tertiary and research institutes, as well as nationwide academic networks. The second type is community-based advocacy that addresses the specific needs of domestic workers

through their participation.

Below are three cases demonstrating the aforementioned types of advocacy work. The first type can be seen in our collaborations with academic institutes like the CLWL, while the second type can be seen in our work with the MWC and the Gichon Centre. The MWC integrated community services for domestic workers with national policy advocacy as well as issue-based advocacy. The Gichon Centre integrated community services with advocacy for local legislation.

#### 2.1.1 The Centre for Labour and Worklife Law, Southwest University of Political Science and Law (CLWL)



Figure 9: The CLWL's Project Management Process

##### 2.1.1.1 Situation Analysis on Labour Rights of Domestic Workers

There are hundreds academics expert in labour law in China. However, domestic work is not their interests of study and there is little research conducted in this area. OHK worked with the CLWL to fund scholars to study legislative protection related to domestic workers in China, as a key strategy for policy influence.

In 2009, OHK collaborated with the CLWL and conducted research on labour rights protection for domestic workers, and looked at these issues from a legal perspective. It presented various countries' legislation practices and compared them to policies and regulations in China. The CLWL also researched domestic workers labour rights in many cities and produced a research report.

##### 2.1.1.2 Conference and Publication

To encourage more scholars to look into domestic workers' labour rights and gather research in the area, the CLWL called for papers on the topic from labour law experts and organised a conference via the Humanity and Social Science Web of Chinese Tertiary Institutes in 2010. The conference not only attracted over 60 local scholars from higher education institutes, but also encouraged many of them to research this area and raised awareness among domestic workers about protecting their own labour rights.

Through the conference, the CLWL received 38 articles, which covered various aspects such as the root causes of domestic worker labour rights problems as well as possible solutions to improve the legislation. The articles also reflected the current



announce the conclusions drawn at the conference. The MWC shared its research findings and rights protection cases over the years at the conference as well as various organisations' experience of influencing work nationally and internationally.

#### 2.1.2.4 Public Campaign on Rights Protection of Domestic Workers through Mass Media, Activities and Publications

##### ● Campaigning through Activities and the Media

In 2011, the MWC began to develop public campaigns in which domestic workers were engaged. For example, they partnered with another NGO named Beijing Chengbiancun, which also served migrant domestic workers, to conduct a video project in which domestic workers filmed their fellow workers of their daily lives and needs. The documentary, entitled 'We are the Same' was released as a DVD and premiered in September 2011. It received good media coverage and aroused the awareness of the general public.

At the end of 2011, the MWC also organised its first-ever 'Beijing Ten Best Domestic Worker Employers and Ten Best Domestic Workers Double Awards' in which winners were selected by both employers and employees to advocate for the better treatment of domestic workers. They also organised the 'Same Heart for Mothers and Children: Realising Dreams in Beijing' campaign in August 2012, during which 10 mothers were reunited with their children

in Beijing. The campaign aimed to help the public understand that many female domestic workers leave their own families to make a living by taking care of other families. Through the campaign, they also promoted decent work and equal treatment for domestic workers. More support from society was given to the domestic workers as a result of this campaign.

The 'Viola Philippica Drama Club' has given performances at different levels: from internal new year activities within the organisation to performances for other NGOs in Labour Cultural Festival; from small-scale performance to professional public stage performances in Beijing. This community-based drama club is gaining more and more media attention and social influence, and has achieved positive impact in the public campaign and domestic workers have learnt to speak up for themselves.

On 1 May, 2014, the MWC worked with the Philanthropy Forum to organise an experiential day of domestic services entitled 'Experience an Occupation, Respect a Community', which drew extensive media attention. They also encouraged public involvement through new media.

##### ● Campaigning through Publications

The MWC campaigned for change by publishing books and regular articles in journals.



The MWC, ILO and OHK jointly organised an international conference on 'Decent Work for Domestic Workers and Employment Promotion' in Beijing in December, 2009.

Name of Publication	Content	Target Audience
Newsletter of MWC	A quarterly newsletter which introduces the work of the MWC, provides updates on policies related to migrant women and publishes articles written by migrant working women, especially domestic workers.	Domestic workers, the public
Handbook for Employers	Contains five chapters: employment, relationship, taboos, disputes and communications, tips on how to get along with domestic workers, and encourage mutual communication between employers.	Employers, the public
Looking into Domestic Workers' Lives	A collection of the MWC's legal assistance cases pertaining to domestic workers that documents the psychological struggles of domestic workers in the process.	The public
A Glorious and Tough Journey: A Record of Working Women in the Informal Sector and Defending their Labour Rights	A collection of typical legal assistance cases for women working in the informal sector (including domestic workers) supported by the MWC over the years. Each case was supplemented with experts' comments to help workers learn about their legal rights.	Workers
Blue Book of Rural Women Development in China	This is the first blue book in China that talks about the development of the female rural migrant population. It includes information on a study about domestic workers.	Scholars and the public

#### 2.1.3 The Gichon Centre

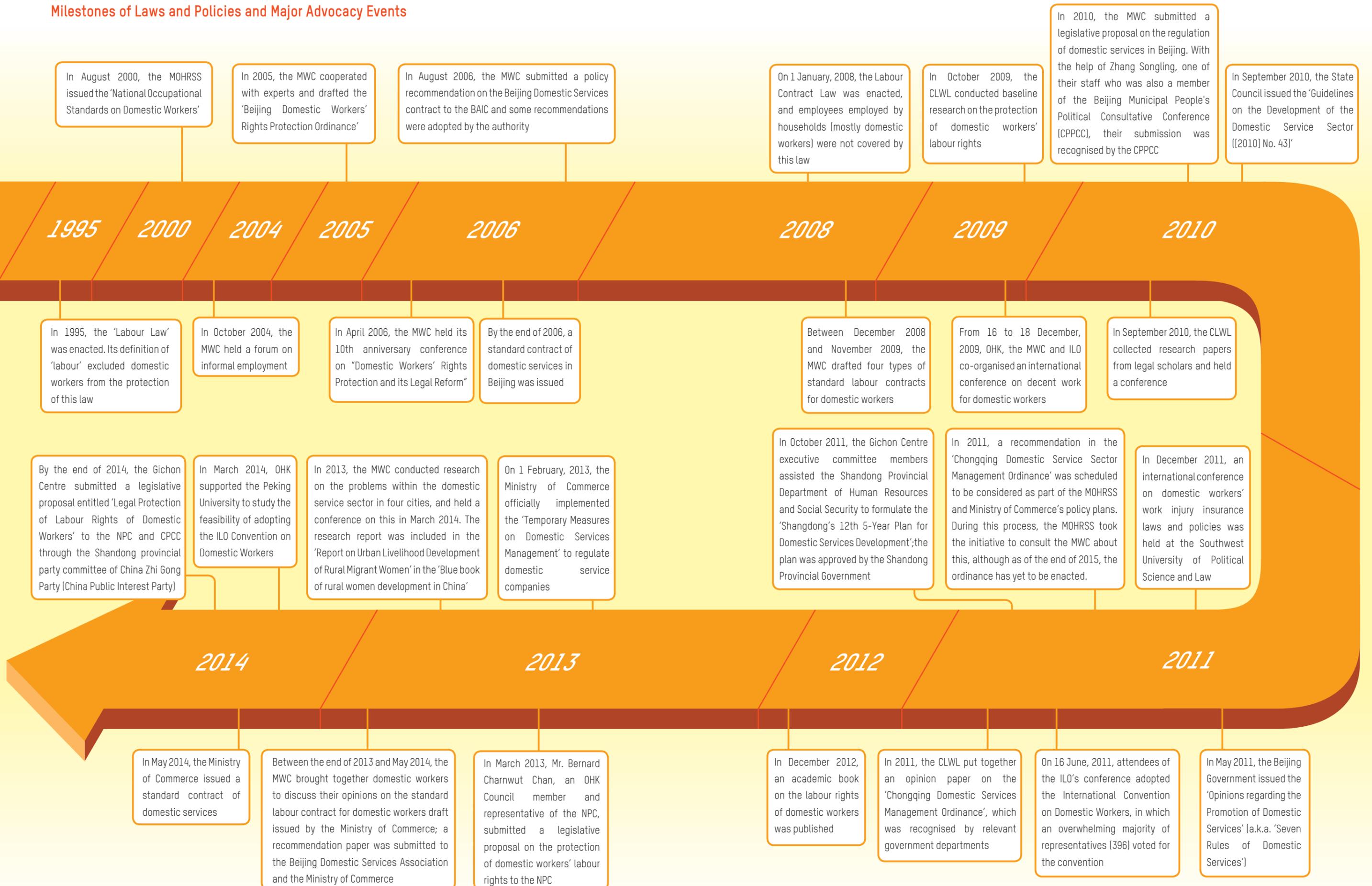
The Gichon Centre formed legal advocacy groups among domestic workers. They facilitated small group discussions, which revolved around issues like social insurance, labour contracts, work injuries and the regulation of the domestic service sector.

In October 2011, the Gichon Centre's executive committee members assisted the Shandong Provincial Department of Human Resources and Social Security to formulate the 'Shandong's 12th 5-Year Plan for Domestic Services Development'. The plan included details on protecting domestic workers' labour rights, was approved by the Shandong Provincial Government and published in two newspapers: the China Labour and Social Security News and Public Daily.

On 6 July, 2014, the Gichon Centre held a conference on the social policies that protect domestic workers' labour rights and the development of domestic service sector, which raised concerns across society, among academics and within the government. A research paper entitled "Domestic Workers' Labour Rights Protection Problems and an Exploration of Legislative Proposals" written by the Gichon Centre's project team helped raise

awareness among domestic workers. As domestic workers participated in the research process, some of them started to express their demands in regard to their rights. By the end of 2014, they submitted a legislative proposal entitled "The Legal Protection of Domestic Workers' Labour Rights" to the National People's Congress (NPC) and the CPCC through the Shandong provincial party committee member of the China Zhi Gong Party (China Public Interest Party). The "Domestic Workers' Labour Rights Protection Problems and an Exploration of Legislative Proposals" went on to receive the 'Women and Girls Research Award (first class)' from the Shandong Provincial Women's Federation.

## Milestones of Laws and Policies and Major Advocacy Events



## 2.2 Outcomes and Impacts of Advocacy Work

### 2.2.1 Public Awareness of Domestic Workers' Rights Protection Raised

The activities of the MWC were widely reported by the media, which raised much public attention. For example, the CCTV's 'Evening News Broadcast' broadcasted an interview with the MWC and produced a series of reports on domestic workers' current situation with regard to their legal rights. National newspapers such as China Women's News and The China Youth Daily reported on the MWC's conferences related to domestic workers and discussed these issues.

The cultural activities campaign also drew public concerns. For example, the drama club made use of the media effectively to voice out for themselves, resulting in a lot of media attentions and reports. The club raised public understanding and respect towards domestic workers as well as their labour values, and facilitated the realisation of decent work for domestic workers. It also helped to advance the policy advocacy work.



Domestic workers learnt to tell their own stories through drama performances.

### 2.2.2 Domestic Workers Empowered through Participating in Advocacy Efforts

Besides being able to speak up through OHK's partner organisations' community activities, domestic workers also had opportunities to attend conferences and voice their opinions there. Through these activities and initiatives, domestic workers' awareness was raised.

During the Home Care Service's meeting between employers and employees in Beijing, domestic workers were further able to speak up and raised their concerns with their employers. Chen, a member of the Women's Committee of the Home Care Service Union, expressed her request for triple payment for overtime work during festivals, as per the ILO Domestic Workers Convention. Although their suggestion was not accepted by the employers, she and other domestic workers were at least able to make their voices heard and had the courage to protect their labour rights.

### 2.2.3 Labour Law Scholars Paid More Attention to the Protection of Domestic Workers

The MWC and the CLWL called for papers on the topic and organised a conference to encourage more scholars to conduct research about and discuss protecting the labour rights of domestic workers. Their research findings were published in three books on domestic workers. Since then, more scholars have recognised the need for legislation on labour rights protection of domestic workers and have pushed policy advocacy efforts forward.

During the process of formulating an ordinance on the protection of domestic workers' rights, the officers from MOHRSS took the initiative to consult the MWC on the draft and took their analysis and recommendations into consideration.

### 2.2.4 Standardised Employment Contracts for Domestic Workers in Beijing Enforced

The four standardised contracts that the MWC drafted are now used by most full-time domestic workers in Beijing and domestic worker cooperatives, and serves a reference for domestic service companies. This was possible

due to the MWC's advocacy efforts and domestic workers' improved negotiation skills. With these standardised contracts, domestic workers' labour rights – including work hours, the scope of work, meal breaks and rest days – are now better defined. These contracts also serve an important role during disputes, and have thus empowered domestic workers. This is an important step towards guaranteeing domestic workers' labour rights.

### 2.2.5 Progress Made with Regard to Municipal Legislation

The CLWL organised meetings with relevant officials from the Internal and Judicial Affairs Committee of Chongqing Municipal People's Congress, Chongqing MOHRSS and so on. A consensus was reached to push forward the 'Chongqing Domestic Services Management Ordinance'. The CLWL also drafted a recommendation concerning the 'Chongqing Domestic Services Management Ordinance' and submitted to the Internal and Judicial Affairs Committee of Chongqing, Municipal People's Congress and the Chongqing MOHRSS.

The executive committee members of Gichon Centre was commissioned by Shandong Provincial Bureau of Human Resources and Social Security to draft a 12th 5-year plan for domestic services, and they included the legislation on domestic services law into the planning.

### 2.2.6 Domestic Workers' Labour Rights Incorporated into Agenda of Government Policy Plan

The MWC started advocating for the legislation of laws that protect domestic workers in 2003. Over the years, it has made great strides in this area through various means including annual and biannual conferences that help give voice to the needs of the domestic worker community and emphasise the need for legislations that protect their rights. Furthermore, OHK and the Gichon Centre advocated for legislations that protect domestic workers by submitting legislative proposals to various government departments through representatives of NPC and CPPCC.

By 2011, a recommendation in the 'Chongqing Domestic Service Sector Management Ordinance' was scheduled to be considered as part of the MOHRSS and Ministry of Commerce's policy plans. Although relevant regulations and policies are not in place yet, government departments are beginning to consider adopting laws and policies that protect the rights of domestic workers as a result of increased public attention on the issue, and OHK and its partners' advocacy work.

### 2.2.7 Partners Contributed to Formulation of ILO Convention

OHK has been cooperating with the MWC for years; the project gained reputation and provided valuable data and cases to ILO Beijing office and for the Chinese government to compile a report to ILO.

On 14 November, 2010, the MWC brought together 40 domestic workers and 10 lawyers to discuss the 'Preliminary Convention on Decent Work for Domestic Workers'. They consolidated and submitted the feedback they received on this to the ILO Beijing Office.

On 16 June, 2011, the ILO conference adopted an International Convention on Domestic Workers; 396 representatives voted for the adoption of the Convention, while 16 were against doing so and 63 abstained. The MWC also shared the details of the Convention and its significance with domestic workers in the community through group activities and workshops.

## 3 Partners' Development

Through years of working together, OHK has built up the capacity of our partners and empowered them to provide stronger support to domestic workers. Local NGOs gained the ability, strength and knowledge to bring about change, and more scholars were also encouraged to conduct research and carry out advocacy work to advance the rights of domestic workers. In the long run, we hope it will become a stronger force to enhance the livelihoods of and provide greater protection to domestic workers.

Outcomes and impacts of building up partners' capacity:

### 3.1 New NGOs Nurtured and their Capacity Enhanced

Since 2007, OHK has been nurturing new partners through exchanges with potential partners and recruiting organisations. By doing this, new NGOs such as the Gichon Centre and Beijing Hongyan Cultural Development were developed. OHK also directly funds projects and supports the holistic development of these organisations.

Moreover, OHK places emphasis on staff training to cultivate potential human resources

for the domestic workers' service development. For instance, OHK regularly organises exchanges, thematic workshops and information sharing sessions to enhance communication among partners. In 2010, OHK initiated a capacity building project for partners working with domestic workers to enhance their knowledge and awareness on the challenges domestic workers face. The project also helped build up their capacity through annual staff exchange and annual thematic workshops.

### 3.2 Academic Resources in relation to labour rights of domestic workers Developed

In 2011, OHK invited academics, teachers from higher education institutes and other interested parties or individuals to carry out a research project on the labour rights of domestic workers. Through research, conferences, publications, as well as advocacy work carried out with the university, OHK not only made an impact on work injury insurance and local legislation in Chongqing, but also brought together a group of scholars who were concerned about the labour rights of domestic workers.

## Part IV Good Practices and Lessons Learnt

### 1 Good Practices

The objectives of OHK's Domestic Workers' Programme are threefold: 1) to empower domestic workers and establish a mutual support network for them; 2) to enhance the social recognition of domestic workers' labour rights and create a conducive environment for policy advocacy in the area; 3) to work with partner organisations, academics, domestic workers' communities and relevant stakeholders to jointly advocate for the

legislation of labour laws that protect domestic workers. OHK implemented the Domestic Workers' Programme together with partner organisations to meet these objectives based on the mission of each organisation.

OHK's experience gained through this programme are as follows:



The Migrant Women's Club nurtured core members through various group activities.

### 1.1 Targeted Community Work

OHK's partners developed specific project strategies and allocated resources according to the needs and characteristics of domestic workers.

For example, to help laid-off female workers transition away from the support system they were used to, which was offered through unions, the Xi'an Marginalised Domestic Workers Support project established a domestic workers' trade union to rebuild the social support network and organisational support system for domestic workers.

Moreover, the MWC mainly focused on rural migrants in the cities. When the rural migrants first entered the cities, their education level was relatively low; their legal knowledge and ability to protect themselves were limited; their job skills were weak; they lacked social support network in a new place and faced exclusion and discrimination by the local residents. They were marginalised in the cities. To improve these workers' situation, the MWC has established a legal rights protection group among rural migrants, particularly women migrants, and offered legal assistance since 2002.

The MWC gradually went on to develop projects that offer skills training to workers, establish support networks, train up core members and so on. They also engaged in policy advocacy and public campaigns to eliminate discrimination against migrant workers, improve their social situations, and enhance public understanding and respect towards domestic workers.

During outreach activities in the early stages of the project, the Gichon Centre discovered the Da Jian Gou community, which is a suburban area inhabited by domestic workers. At the time, most of the domestic workers there were local women who had lost their farmland and had begun working in the domestic services sector. Based on existing social networks and resources, the Gichon carried out community services and built up domestic workers support networks to enhance the sense of community among and recognition of domestic workers. The project also encouraged domestic workers to speak up through cultural activities and such so that they would gain more confidence, greater recognition of their occupation and overcome the social prejudices they face.

## 1.2 Empowerment, Participation, and Voices of Domestic Workers

Apart from direct services and assistance, our project partners focused on the empowerment of domestic workers, building a mutual support network, core members' training, peer support activities and so on. For example, our partner encouraged domestic workers to share among themselves their job skills and communication tactics with employers through small group discussions. Our partners nurtured a group of core members among the domestic workers. The self-growth of these core members contributed to the development of the projects and the organisations as well as improvement of the community's situation.

The project provided a platform for domestic workers to voice out for themselves. Our partners focused on the voices of domestic workers in the advocacy work. Their recommendations to the government were all based on the discussions with domestic workers. Meanwhile, domestic workers had opportunities to speak up publicly during

conferences and other events. The project also encouraged domestic workers to express their thoughts and demands through songs, dramas and video taking. Domestic workers' voices were disseminated through community stages, traditional and new media. This not only built up a collective recognition among the community, but also urged the public to value the contribution of domestic workers and facilitated our policy advocacy work.

### 1.3 Bringing a Rights-Based Perspective into the Discourse

OHK's programme successfully stirred up discussion on labour rights of domestic workers among academics and within the government. The publications OHK supported focused on the labour rights and living conditions of domestic workers, as few people talked about this in mainland China. Our project brought a rights-based perspective to discussions about domestic service development, as dialogue of this sort used to only focus on regulations within the sector.



OHK's programme successfully stirred up discussion on labour rights of domestic workers among academics and within the government.

## 1.4 Bringing Community and Policy Advocacy Work Together

Both OHK and its partners learnt that community and policy advocacy work go hand in hand. It is only after gaining a better understanding of the needs of domestic workers through community services that OHK and its partners can carry out more effective advocacy work.

For example, through the Gichon Centre's outreach activities and in-depth interviews, they were able to collect domestic workers' views and incorporate them into their policy suggestions. Equally important, they encouraged the participation of domestic workers during their advocacy process. Likewise, the MWC also focused on the direct participation of domestic workers in the formulation of ILO conventions and in advocacy efforts to call for legislation that protects their rights.

### 1.5 Empowerment of Domestic Workers when Carrying out Public Campaigns

Community work is a foundation of empowerment of domestic workers. Our work, including skills training, the establishment of mutual support network, core members' training, and autonomous organisations development on one hand contributed to the capacity building of domestic workers, and on the other hand facilitated the networking among domestic workers and achieved empowerment of them.

Domestic workers were equipped with relevant job skills and able to meet the job requirements after skills training. They gained emotional support, resources connections for actions and knowledge sharing through the establishment of mutual support network. Consequently, Internal communication among the domestic workers was strengthened and their sense of mutuality and recognition of self-identity were enhanced. In this process, their awareness of identity and occupational consciousness was also gradually developed. The training of core members of domestic workers and establishment of autonomous organisations not only serve as a means of empowerment, but also

an indicator of the project outcomes. Empowerment of domestic workers was achieved when the domestic workers organised their own activities and organisations. The domestic workers could work together to improve the conditions of the community.

The public image of the domestic workers was improved through community work. For example, the public performances of the Vio Philippica Drama Club helped the public to gain a new understanding of domestic workers, and contributed to the elimination of the discrimination and prejudice against domestic workers.

### 1.6 Timing and Effective Advocacy Work

Good strategies and well-timed responses to the different situations are vital to advocacy work. For example, knowing that the Beijing Administration for Industry and Commerce was going to introduce a standard contract, the MWC immediately gathered domestic workers to discuss the draft and proposed revisions at the right time. As a result, some of their recommendations were adopted. Moreover, when the ILO was formulating a domestic workers convention, the MWC jumped on the opportunity to speak up and advocate for relevant policy reforms in the country.

### 1.7 Developing Partners' Capacity at Every Stage of a Programme

Project management could not leave out the efforts and capacity building of our partners. The Urban Livelihood Team of OHK always focused on training and capacity building of partners under the thematic programme. Apart from giving support to the establishment of new partner organisations, OHK also expanded its partnership through tendering of projects and funded capacity building activities of the partners. Meanwhile, the team also consciously supported exchange activities among experienced and new partners through annual thematic meetings related to domestic workers and regular information sharing to enhance the experiences accumulation and capacity development of the partners.



In 2011, the MWC organised its first-ever 'Beijing Ten Best Domestic Worker Employers and Ten Best Domestic Workers Double Awards' to advocate for the better treatment of domestic workers.

## 2 Challenges and Lessons Learnt

### 2.1 Difficulty of Setting Up Cooperatives due to Legal Limitations

Apart from the initiatives mentioned in the previous section, OHK also tried to form cooperatives to help domestic workers avoid being exploited by domestic service agencies. However, it was found that there are no laws that regulate cooperatives in cities within the country, meaning cooperatives would not obtain legal status. They could only register as businesses, thereby increasing their legal risks. Although the 'cooperative' operated for a while, it was ultimately unable to sustain itself and was thus forced to close down.

### 2.2 Limited Academic Resources and Inadequate Communication between Academics and Frontline Community Service Providers

Although OHK built up an academic network and long-term partnerships with some scholars, there remained a lack in academic resources that OHK could tap into during the execution of the project. It is still a challenge to look for academics who share similar advocacy goals, possess a grassroots perspective, and are influential in the academic field and in the government at various levels.

Furthermore, it was difficult building long-term and stable partnerships between academics and community workers in Beijing – a strategic area for policy advocacy. Without scholars' expertise, community workers were unable to effectively carry out advocacy work.

### 2.3 Few Advocacy Avenues

There are limitations in the macro context such as the social constraints on advocacy as well as the capacity of OHK's Urban Livelihood Team and project partners.

There is room for improvement with regard to the Urban Livelihood Team's policy advocacy knowhow and resource development. As for project partners, most grassroots NGOs lacked advocacy experience and capacity, and thus could not integrate advocacy work into their frontline work. In regard to academics, they often made policy recommendations and proposals, but few of them made their voices heard through the media, or raised public awareness about domestic workers' rights. As a result, the public was not aware of some of OHK's projects, the impact of its advocacy work was limited. Therefore, greater effort should be placed on integrating policy advocacy and awareness raising.

### 2.4 Few NGOs Serving Domestic Workers

Currently, there are few organisations that offer community services to domestic workers. OHK's partners in China such as the MWC, Beijing Jin Lin, and Beijing Hongyan Cultural Development and the Gichon Centre worked mainly in Beijing and Jinan only. This influenced our representation of the domestic workers and scope of impacts. More effort should thus be placed on nurturing new partner organisations and encouraging charitable organisations to offer community services to domestic workers.

## Part V Going Forward

Based on the positive impacts made and lessons learnt, OHK has consolidated the following recommendations for future work in the area:

### 1 Recruit More Partner Organisations and Build Up their Capacity

In order to make the voices of domestic workers heard and increase OHK and its partners' influence in the area, it is necessary to recruit more partners. At the same time, OHK will continue to build up the capacity of our partners through training and overseas learning experiences.

### 2 Look for Timely and Appropriate Opportunities for Policy Advocacy

The team will continue to carry out timely advocacy work. For instance, with the current development of elderly care services due to the aging population in China, the team will support our partners to gain government subsidies on elderly care services and advocate for the rights protections of domestic workers.

The team will also continue to strengthen ties with scholars in higher education institutions, and strive to enhance dialogue and cooperation with the ILO Beijing Office to explore possibilities of joint research and advocacy.

### 3 Strengthen Public Campaign Efforts and Share Programme Experience within Oxfam Confederation

OHK and its partners will continue to raise public awareness through online and offline media, and other means. OHK will also share its programme experience within the Oxfam confederation.

**OHK and its partners have achieved positive outcomes over the past 10 years and have built a good foundation in this area. OHK believes that together with the community, partners and all stakeholders, domestic workers' rights can be better protected and a more conducive environment can be created for domestic workers to thrive.**

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## Appendix: List of Project Partners

Partners	Project Descriptions
Migrant Women's Club of Beijing Cultural Development Centre for Rural Women (MWC)	<p>The MWC provides legal assistance to domestic workers through disseminating legal knowledge and offering legal advice. They also organise drama workshops, small group activities and leadership training for domestic workers.</p> <p>They also founded the Beijing Rural Women Home Care Service (hereafter Home Care Service) in 2010. The project supports Home Care Service to promote decent work for domestic workers and to build up domestic workers' professional image through training, seminars, dialogue between employers and domestic workers.</p> <p>The MWC, in collaboration with legal experts, advocate for standard contracts, and domestic workers' rights through research, report writing, and seminar discussions at the national and local level (Beijing).</p>
Women's Development and Rights Research Centre, Northwestern Polytechnic University	<p>The Centre collaborated with the Xi'an Federation of Trade Union through the project to enhance the self-awareness, self-development and legal knowledge of laid-off female workers, single working mothers and rural migrants (who were mostly domestic workers). It also aimed to foster mutual support among these groups to improve their situation and rights.</p>
Gichon Social Service Centre for Community (Gichon Centre)	<p>The Gichon Centre has been working on domestic worker projects that focus on areas such as individual capacity and awareness building, fostering mutual support, rights protection and policy advocacy.</p> <p>The Gichon Centre conducted a survey on domestic workers' rights in Shangdong province and published a report, and organised seminars involving stakeholders to discuss domestic workers' rights protection in Shangdong province.</p>
Beijing Gender Cultural Development Centre	<p>The Beijing Gender Cultural Development Centre provided integrated services for domestic workers in the Wangjing district of Beijing. They offered cultural activities, a hotline, a library, second-hand shops, talks, small group activities and such to foster social interaction and cultural life for domestic workers, and to strengthen their sense of community, self-confidence and raise their awareness of their rights.</p>
The Chengbiancun Project Group (Chengbiancun)	<p>Chengbiancun organised classes for domestic workers on how to make videos to encourage them to express themselves through images. The Centre also carried out other activities through the project such as documenting group discussions and putting on dramas related to domestic workers. They produced a documentary entitled 'We Are the Same'.</p>
Beijing Jin Lin Social Service Centre (Beijing Jin Lin)	<p>OHK has been supporting Beijing Jin Lin's English classes for domestic workers who worked for foreign employers to enhance their ability to communicate with their employers, expand resources network for domestic workers and equip active members in the domestic workers' community to participate in public affairs.</p>
School of Social Development and Public Policy of Fudan University (SSDPP)	<p>The SSDPP received support from OHK to conduct a needs assessment and survey regarding the social insurance domestic workers receive. This includes their benefits coverage and the demands of domestic workers.</p>

Partners	Project Descriptions
The Centre for Labour and Worklife Law, Southwest University of Political Science and Law (CLWL)	<p>The CLWL developed a research project on the protection of domestic workers' labour rights based on national and international labour laws. This provided valuable reference on the topic of domestic service legislations in China. The CLWL further formulated policy proposals on work injury insurance for domestic workers and submitted them to government departments. At the same time, the CLWL conducted studies and called for provincial legislation in this area in Chongqing city.</p>
Economic Legality Research Centre of Anhui University (ELRC)	<p>The ELRC conducted systematic analyses on laws, regulations, ordinances, and sample contracts related to domestic workers at the national and local levels. Recommendations for relevant legislations were then proposed.</p>
The Institute of Labour and Social Security Law of Peking University Law School (ILSS)	<p>The ILSS carried out a project to push for the ratification of the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on domestic workers in China. They studied the existing national laws regarding domestic workers in China as well as overseas legal reforms after their adoption of the convention. The ILSS submitted proposals and contributed to seminar discussions to push for national legislation in China in this area.</p>



## About Oxfam

One person in three in the world lives in poverty. Oxfam is determined to change that world by mobilising the power of people against poverty. Around the globe, Oxfam works to find practical, innovative ways for people to lift themselves out of poverty and thrive. We save lives and help rebuild livelihoods when crisis strikes. And we campaign so that the voices of the poor influence the local and global decisions that affect them. In all we do, Oxfam works with partner organisations and alongside vulnerable women and men to end the injustices that cause poverty.

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