

Claiming Half the Sky: Understanding Women - Centered Development in China



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Project Goal

- To place women at the center of development planning and implementation in order to ensure a more equitable distribution of resources and other benefits to the society

Personal Goals

- Learning more about the development needs of Chinese women
- Building close relationships with a few ordinary Chinese women in Beijing
- Understanding Chinese women's experiences through an Indian woman's eyes



Activities

- Helped organize UNIFEM events, including a public screening of a videoconference on a global campaign to eliminate domestic violence
- Visited sites for potential UNIFEM projects
- Explored issues and experiences of laid-off women, by visiting with them individually, and visiting centers and "help lines" established to support them
- Met with Women's Studies professors and women's activists
- Volunteered at "Rural Women Knowing All," a Chinese Magazine

Key Dilemmas

- It was hard to shed the image of 'exotic foreigner' and be treated as a regular person.
- My limited fluency in Chinese frustrated by desire to learn as much about the culture as I had hoped
- I was often confronted by a blinding sense of guilt about having so much more than the women I met who were materially so poor
- I was frustrated and upset by my difficulties in finding emotional connections with women of vastly different life experiences than mine.



Important Learnings

- I learned a sense of humility and appreciation for all that I have.
- By cooking, talking, laughing and working together I became close friends with my Chinese roommate. This friendship is, in itself, an achievement, accomplished through time, patience, and constant effort and produced an indescribable high.
- A majority of the women I met had an interesting combination of an intense commitment to the idea for social equality and empowerment, along with trepidation about exactly how to prioritize the needs of Chinese women.

