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UNFPA – Country programmes and related matters

United Nations Population Fund

Country programme document for China

Proposed indicative UNFPA assistance: \$21.0 million: \$7.7 million from regular resources and \$13.3 million through co-financing modalities or other resources

Programme period: Five years (2021-2025)

Cycle of assistance: Ninth

Category per decision 2017/23: Pink

Alignment with the UNSDCF Cycle United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework, 2021-2025

Proposed indicative assistance (in millions of \$):

Programme outcome areas		Regular resources	Other resources	Total
Outcome 1	Sexual and reproductive health	2.4	5.0	7.4
Outcome 2	Adolescents and youth	1.3	3.2	4.5
Outcome 3	Gender equality and empowerment of women	1.5	2.1	3.6
Outcome 4	Population dynamics	1.6	3.0	4.6
Programme coordination and assistance		0.9	-	0.9
Total		7.7	13.3	21.0



I. Programme rationale

1. Social and economic progress over the past four decades has established China as an upper-middle income country and the second largest economy in the world. While China is the most populous developing country, with 1.4 billion people, it is undergoing a transition from rapid economic growth to a development model that, according to the Government of China, prioritizes balanced pursuit of high-quality development, with the aim to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 14th Five-Year National Plan (2021-2025).

2. Notwithstanding China's progress in eradicating extreme poverty by 2020, achieving universal basic education for all since the early 1990s and reducing the maternal mortality rate by more than 75 per cent between 1990 and 2018 (down to 18.3 per 100,000 live births), a number of difficult long-standing and emerging challenges persist, which threaten its full implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda.

3. One major challenge identified by the recently completed United Nations Common Country Analysis (CCA) is China's demography. Since 1990, the total fertility rate of Chinese women has averaged 1.6; in 2019, a total of 14.6 million births were registered, the lowest in six decades. With life expectancy rising from 69.1 years in 1990 to 77.0 years in 2018, the proportion of the population aged 65 or above has risen steadily from 7.0 per cent in 2000 to 12.6 per cent in 2019, and could reach 26.1 per cent by 2050. The proportion of the urban population has risen from 29.0 per cent in 1995 to 59.6 per cent in 2018 and is expected to exceed 70 per cent by 2030. This combination of sustained low fertility, rapid ageing and rapid urbanization is a new historical experience for China; commensurate policy responses that respect ICPD principles are urgently required.

4. Disparities and inequalities in access to quality sexual and reproductive health services still exist in China. Alongside overall decline in maternal mortality at the national level, there is a widening gap between urban and rural areas, and between the eastern and western parts of the country. For example, the ratio for Qinghai province in the west (25.6 per 100,000 live births in 2018) is comparatively higher than the national average. Access to high-quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services for vulnerable populations such as unmarried youth has room to improve. In spite of a national contraceptive prevalence of 86.1 per cent, there were 9 million abortions in 2018, with about 40 percent among unmarried female youth, reflecting their high unmet need for family planning. Comprehensive sexuality education and youth-friendly SRH services for young people are limited in coverage, while more voices from marginalized youth communities can be included in the decision-making process on major youth development issues.

5. Despite progress in tackling gender inequality, gender-based violence and discrimination persist. On average, women earn less than men in comparable positions and spend three times as much time on unpaid care work as men. 'Son preference' has led to gender-biased sex selection (GBSS), resulting in a skewed sex ratio at birth, which despite recent annual declines remained high (111.9 boys born for every 100 girls in 2017). A 2011 national survey indicated about a quarter of married Chinese women had experienced domestic violence. In response, the Anti-Domestic Violence Law was enacted in 2016 but its full implementation needs to be strengthened. There is currently no national law on sexual harassment or sexual violence.

6. China has a relatively strong institutional capacity for collecting socioeconomic, demographic and environmental data. Different government agencies sometimes utilize divergent methodologies, making it difficult to access and analyse the data generated. China presently needs to improve its collection of official data for the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators when considering specific target groups as reflected in the lack of up-to-date, nationally representative data on youth sexual behaviour. Augmenting existing official data with data from Big Data platforms and specialized surveys, would enable coverage of additional SDG indicators, and disaggregated analysis of SDG progress.

7. China has become an important participant in South-South and global cooperation (SSGC) with other developing countries. China is committed to enhancing international development cooperation needed for the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda through working with the United Nations and other partners. Since 2015, China has increased its structuring of foreign aid management by establishing the South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF), funding it with \$3 billion, and, in 2018, the China International Development Cooperation Agency to oversee the Fund. This offers an opportunity to achieve the ICPD Agenda in China and other developing countries as a contribution to the achievement of the SDGs. China has also proposed the Belt and Road Initiative.

8. Implemented at national level, the eighth UNFPA country programme (2016-2020) contributed significantly to national efforts at expanding access to comprehensive rights-based family planning and SRH programmes for vulnerable youth and women. It effectively used the generation and strategic dissemination of new research and evidence to promote 'smart and equitable ageing' within policy discourses and programme planning at the national and subnational levels. It supported the eradication of GBSS through community mobilization efforts to change social norms that are supportive of 'son preference' in the three worst affected provinces (Anhui, Guangxi and Hubei), an effort that has been acknowledged by governmental and donor partners as contributing since 2016 to the increasing normalization of China's skewed sex ratio at birth. It supported China's SSGC efforts to improve maternal health and population and development planning in other developing countries, especially in Africa.

9. An independent country programme review and thematic evaluation of UNFPA support to SSGC indicated the need to: (a) enhance the strategic direction of the programme in line with national development priorities, the ICPD Programme of Action and the SDGs, with a focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and population and development, utilizing gender equality and 'leaving no one behind' as underpinning principles; (b) better address the unmet need for SRH services for young people and women in vulnerable situations; (c) strengthen synergies between subnational level demonstration projects around gender violence and sex selection, low fertility/ageing and unmet SRH needs of vulnerable women and young people, and national policy advocacy; (d) enhance national capacity for generation and utilization of disaggregated data for supporting a life-cycle approach to ageing and tracking of SDG progress; (e) develop a more strategic bidirectional approach to support China's SSGC for the achievement of the 'three zeros' in China and in other developing countries; and (f) diversify and consolidate longer-term strategic partnerships to address emerging needs.

10. The proposed ninth country programme is based on two outcomes of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) for China (2021-2025), which has been largely formulated and finalized on the basis of the CCA and extensive consultations with key stakeholders, especially the Government. With UNFPA active involvement, the new UNSDCF has prioritized issues that are core to the UNFPA mandate including a life-cycle approach to demographic transition, addressing gender-based and other forms of discrimination, reducing vulnerability, supporting young people's wholesome transition to adulthood, improving equitable and high-quality public services, including health for all, addressing the lack of disaggregated data, and enhancing support for SDG attainment in China and other developing countries.

11. The UNSDCF is designed to enable China to achieve integrated social, environmental and economic development under the 2030 Agenda. The ninth country programme will draw on the UNFPA comparative advantage around population data, youth development, gender equality, and a rights-based approach to development to contribute to the delivery of the UNSDCF by supporting China's efforts to realize universal access to SRHR through a life-cycle approach and mutually beneficial SSGC. UNFPA will actively participate in joint United Nations-government initiatives to promote innovative public-private partnerships for sustainable institutional responses to rapid ageing. As a co-lead of the United Nations Theme Group on Gender, UNFPA will collaborate with United Nations partner organizations to

support the development of multisectoral coordination mechanisms for the effective implementation of the 2016 Anti-Domestic Violence Law. These contributions draw on the UNFPA global network of expertise and alliances as well as long-standing development cooperation with China.

12. Since 2020, COVID-19 has spread rapidly around the world, posing a severe challenge to global public health security and having a profound impact on global development cooperation. UNFPA will use its resources and work with other relevant United Nations agencies to strengthen post-pandemic cooperation with China in prevention and control of public health emergencies.

II. Programme priorities and partnerships

13. The new programme is informed by China's long-term vision of transitioning from rapid economic growth to high-quality, people-centred development encapsulated in the National Plan on implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The thrust of the Decade of Action (2020-2030) for achieving the SDGs for China is rapid progress towards sustainable and equitable development. The programme will contribute to China's SDG ambition through the achievement of the three transformative results – zero unmet need for voluntary family planning, zero preventable maternal deaths, and zero gender-based violence against women and girls – by supporting the actualization of main objectives of the UNSDCF 2021-2025, the Healthy China Action Plan (2019-2030), and China's national commitments from the Nairobi Summit on ICPD25, to complete unfinished aspects of the ICPD agenda through their incorporation into national medium and long-term development plans.

14. Informed by the most recent evaluative evidence on the eighth country programme, the new programme was formulated after extensive consultations with the national government, implementing and strategic partners, United Nations agencies, civil society organizations (CSOs), youth networks, the media and other stakeholders.

15. The programme will focus on reducing prevalent inequalities in accessibility and quality of public services and programmes by advocating integrated rights-based, gender-sensitive and comprehensive SRH programmes for the most vulnerable populations especially unmarried youth, persons with disabilities and other groups at risk of being left behind. It will facilitate SSGC between China and other developing countries in support of SRH improvement, thereby strengthening global partnerships for SDG attainment (SDG 17) and enhancing effectiveness of these efforts, in line with the ICPD Programme of Action.

16. UNFPA will play a convening role on major aspects of the unfinished ICPD agenda in China, including youth SRHR and sexuality education, equity and quality of care in SRH services, low fertility, ageing, and multisectoral responses to gender-based violence. It will do so through high-level policy dialogue, policy advisory and technical assistance, evidence generation (especially on health inequities), strategic media communication, piloting of innovative approaches, facilitation of multi-stakeholder partnerships, seminars and other platforms, including United Nations theme groups.

17. The programme will be implemented at the national and subnational levels to catalyse effective policy responses to the SRHR gaps and needs identified. It will provide advocacy and capacity development to government, civil society and private-sector institutions to strengthen adherence to SRHR-related national and global commitments through revision and implementation of laws, policies and strategies. It will prioritize effective knowledge exchange and capacity transfers between China and other developing countries by leveraging UNFPA global and regional networks, knowledge repositories, and platforms for mutual benefit towards the achievement of the SDGs and the ICPD agenda.

18. UNFPA will strengthen relationships with key policymakers and influencers to leverage their support for the full implementation of the ICPD Agenda. UNFPA will intensively diversify strategic partnerships with governmental agencies, CSOs, academia, think tanks and the private sector to leverage development financing, advocate for universal access to SRH and reproductive rights, and promote SSC, in accordance with General Assembly

resolution 73/291 on the outcome document of the second High-level United Nations Conference on South-South Cooperation held in March 2019, including the principles contained therein of respect for national sovereignty, national ownership and independence, equality, non-conditionality, non-interference in domestic affairs, and mutual benefit; and that South-South Cooperation is not a substitute for but rather a complement to North-South cooperation.

19. UNFPA will mobilize private-sector resources to support programme efforts around reducing disparities in access to high-quality SRH services, enabling a life-cycle approach to healthy and productive ageing, youth SRHR and empowerment, and fostering a bidirectional approach to China's SSGC initiatives. UNFPA will strengthen engagements with influential media platforms to promote the ICPD Programme of Action in a sustained manner. UNFPA will also coordinate its activities with other United Nations organizations in leading efforts at developing rights-based knowledge solutions and cutting-edge policy proposals in support of the Government's quest for sustainable institutional responses to low fertility, rapid ageing, gender inequality, multi-dimensional poverty, and the rights of vulnerable population groups. This will entail active participation in joint United Nations SDGs financing initiatives (entailing collaboration with key development actors such as the World Bank, Asia Development Bank and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank), joint United Nations research and advocacy interventions, and high-level review meetings.

20. The new programme directly contributes to these two UNSDCF outcomes by achieving three associated outputs and three fully-aligned UNFPA-specific outputs as detailed in the results and resources framework:

21. *UNSDCF Outcome 2.* People's lives in China are improved further as headway is made in ensuring access to childcare, education, healthcare services, elderly care, housing and social assistance, and more people in China, including left-behind groups, benefit from equitable and high-quality public services and social protection systems as well as accelerated efforts to reduce gender inequality and other forms of social inequality throughout the life-course.

22. *UNSDCF Outcome 6.* Through South-South cooperation and humanitarian cooperation, China makes greater contributions to SDG attainment and the principles of the 2030 Agenda, including leaving no one behind.

A. Sexual and reproductive health

23. *Output 1 (UNFPA-specific): National policies and programmes to enable women and young people, particularly groups left behind, to access high-quality, rights-based, gender responsive, affordable SRH services are strengthened.*

24. In response to the national priority of eliminating wide health disparities, and in pursuit of the three transformative results and the 2030 Agenda goal of leaving no one behind, the programme will strengthen the policy environment to enable vulnerable women and young people to access integrated and high-quality SRH services, with a focus on rural areas in less developed provinces in western China, to support China's Nairobi Summit commitment on completing the unfinished aspects of the ICPD agenda by: (a) providing technical assistance to integrated, rights-based and gender-sensitive high-quality SRH programmes that meet the needs of the most vulnerable women and young people; (b) using newly generated evidence and advocacy through the United Nations Health Theme Group to engage in policy dialogues with health authorities to strengthen essential SRH services package for universal health coverage; (c) offering evidence-based advocacy and technical guidance to emergency management authorities and the National Health Commission on sustaining the accessibility of vulnerable women and young people to high-quality SRH services during health emergencies like the COVID-19 outbreak and natural disasters and fostering community resilience; and (d) promoting midwifery as an autonomous health profession to enhance the quality of SRH services especially in underserved areas.

25. *Output 2 (linked to UNSDCF Output 6.1): The Government and other Chinese institutions have strengthened capacity to design and deliver evidence-informed development*

and humanitarian cooperation, which is in line with international economic, social, and environmental sustainability standards and priorities of partner countries and other stakeholders.

26. To enhance the effectiveness of China's SSGC efforts to support SDG attainment in China and by other developing countries, in line with the core 2030 Agenda principles, the programme will: (a) share and exchange UNFPA guidelines and international norms and standards to development cooperation, in line with the values and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter, through capacity building workshops and policy dialogues; (b) advocate for key ICPD agenda and SDG issues for enhanced attention within China's development cooperation efforts; (c) support the collation and dissemination of good practices from China's SSC with other developing countries around key SRH and population and development issues; and (d) promote two-way SSC-based sharing of development knowledge and expertise including through shared learning.

27. *Output 3 (UNFPA-specific): China and UNFPA have strengthened global and South-South cooperation and partnerships for the achievement of the unfinished agenda of ICPD Programme of Action and the SDGs in China and other developing countries.*

28. Given China's increasing profile as an SSGC partner, the programme will contribute to enhanced alignment of China's development cooperation to partner countries' SDG-focused priorities and promote two-way partnerships by: (a) facilitating SSC projects between China and other developing countries through China's SSCAF and other aid modalities to support maternal mortality reduction, evidence-based population analysis and projection, and reproductive health commodity security in those countries; (b) facilitating capacity transfer and experience-sharing between China and other developing countries to harness knowledge solutions that can help address policy gaps around youth sexuality education and multisectoral responses to gender-based violence; (c) fostering alliances between governmental, academic, and private sector organizations in China and those of other developing countries to broaden support for the ICPD Agenda; and (d) supporting selected national institutions in China to actively participate in SSC on key ICPD-related issues.

B. Adolescents and youth

29. *Output 1 (UNFPA-specific): Improved evidence and policy environment to address young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights, with a focus on marginalized young people.*

30. This output, which advances the objectives of China's Midterm Youth Development Plan (2016-2026) and the Three-Year HIV Transmission Control Plan (2019-2022), will boost China's human capital by improving the well-being and productivity of its young people. This will be achieved by: (a) providing evidence-based advocacy and technical assistance to inform the design and implementation of policies, programmes and innovative information technology-based solutions on life skills-based sexuality education to prevent unplanned pregnancy, STIs/HIV and promote gender-equitable attitudes among unmarried and marginalized young people; (b) strengthening advocacy capacity of youth networks and enabling their greater participation in policy dialogues on youth sexual and reproductive health and rights, SDGs, and gender equality; (c) generating and strategically utilizing evidence on youth SRH to advocate for supportive policies for the expansion of youth-friendly SRH services for marginalized youth populations; and (d) promoting innovative youth-to-youth partnerships, knowledge exchange platforms and SSGC between China and other developing countries around youth SRH, sustainable development and other emerging issues.

C. Gender equality and women empowerment

31. *Output 1 (linked to UNSDCF Output 2.4): The Government has strengthened capacity to develop and implement evidence-based laws, policies and programmes to reduce violence, exclusion and gender-based and other forms of discrimination.*

32. UNFPA will contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, by ensuring that women and girls in need of protection and care, receive high-quality comprehensive preventative and response services, and by collaborating with partners to promote positive social norm change among partners, families, communities and service providers to support the realisation of gender equality and women's rights. The programme will address the need for effective prevention of and responses to gender-based violence and harmful practices including GBSS by: (a) advocating and supporting, in coordination with common chapter partner United Nations agencies and other members of the United Nations Gender Theme Group, the establishment of functional multisectoral coordination mechanisms for implementation of the Anti-Domestic Violence Law and documenting best practices that are in line with the ICPD agenda and the SDG framework; (b) generating new evidence on the drivers and consequences of gender-based violence and GBSS; (c) providing technical advice to main national partners for promotion of positive evidence-based social norm change to eliminate gender-based violence, discriminatory gender norms and harmful practices including son preference; (d) facilitating cross-country knowledge exchange and SSGC on effective responses to GBSS. and (e) strengthening survivor-centred response to gender-based violence through technical guidance for the development of health service guidelines, in line with the essential services package for women and girls subject to violence.

D. Population dynamics

33. *Output 1 (linked to UNSDCF Output 2.1): The Government has strengthened capacity to design and implement quality, gender-responsive and evidence-based policies and programmes to address China's demographic transition.*

34. This output directly supports the actualization of the National Strategy to Actively Respond to Population Ageing by: (a) providing policy analysis and technical support to enable government to better respond to low fertility and rapid ageing by employing a rights-based life-cycle approach for intensified investments in human capital to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth; (b) conducting disaggregated evidence analysis and policy dialogues to promote adequate attention to the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights of individuals, gender equality and equitable access to social, health, and lifelong learning services within national strategies to address low fertility and challenges associated with rapid ageing; (c) advocating for and supporting the generation of reliable and accessible disaggregated population data in collaboration with the common chapter United Nations agencies to address emerging issues around low fertility, migration, urbanization, multi-dimensional poverty and tracking of SDG progress, with a focus on left-behind groups to fill some of the data gaps related to the prioritized UNFPA SDG indicators; and (d) engendering non-traditional partnerships (including with the private sector) around ageing, population and development planning, and innovations in population data analysis and use.

III. Programme and risk management

35. UNFPA and the Government of China, through the Ministry of Commerce as the

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