



# Multiplying the Good and Building Hope for Tomorrow

Today, one in every ten women in the world is living in extreme poverty. This number will only grow given that our current efforts in eradicating poverty by 2030 are inadequate. To effectively tackle poverty, we need to change our current strategy.<sup>1</sup> Rather than seeing poverty solely as an individual issue, we need to recognize poverty as a societal failure.<sup>2</sup> Society must learn to acknowledge the potential contribution of those in poverty and work towards their inclusion. The contribution of women to alleviating poverty cannot be understated considering their role as caregivers in both families and communities. Investing in women, particularly in developing nations, often leads to significant improvement in the lives of whole ecosystems. Advancing the welfare of women multiplies the good and leads to stronger families and more resilient communities. The efforts to improve labor force participation for women in poverty are great, but they must start with addressing inequities across sectors including healthcare, education, and socio-economic status.

The founding of Tzu Chi is a prime example of the power of women to be the nexus that magnifies impact. Founded by a Buddhist nun, Dharma Master Cheng Yen, and supported by 30 housewives, Tzu Chi is today an international

organization that has changed the lives of millions through service and leadership centered on compassion and empathy. Since 1966, Tzu Chi Foundation has dedicated its efforts towards alleviating the suffering of those in need and ensuring that no one is left behind. Tzu Chi upholds the value of equality for all individuals, regardless of their gender, race, nationality, religion, or social status. Tzu Chi currently provides disaster relief work in 133 countries/regions and aligns its mission and vision with Sustainable Development Goals.

As we prepare for CSW68 and reflect on the upcoming 30th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, Tzu Chi calls upon member states to create a more resilient and equitable future by upholding their commitments to achieving gender equality, and eradicating poverty for all. Understanding that women are often at the center of the virtuous cycle of growth because of their connectedness to family and community allows us to lift all by addressing the necessary preconditions and creating the opportunities needed for women to lead. We believe that in order to effectively reduce poverty, it is essential to bridge the following gaps so that we may address the challenges of marginalized communities.



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# Build Community Infrastructure and Empowerment



“ Provide capacity building and economic opportunities to the most vulnerable, while supporting them with community oriented mentorship and support structures.



Since 1989, the Tzu Chi Nursing College [currently known as Tzu Chi University of Science and Technology (TCUST)] has been a beacon of hope for indigenous young women seeking opportunities in the medical field. Originally designed to help young indigenous women escape child marriage and abusive family situations, Tzu Chi provides nursing scholarships to cover full tuition, fees, and monthly allowances. Equally important, the program provides emotional and spiritual support - a necessary complement to the scholarships - in providing a path out of poverty. To date, this initiative has benefitted both indigenous and non-indigenous women. A total of 2,012 indigenous women and 1,779 non-indigenous women received scholarships, accounting for 94% of all students. Tzu Chi's investment in these scholars has exceeded USD 18 million, reflecting Tzu Chi's commitment to empowering marginalized communities, and cultivating outstanding and compassionate medical professionals. Upon graduation,

graduates are also offered employment at local Tzu Chi Hospitals, ensuring a sustainable cycle of education to employment. According to a recent report, the average nursing license passing rate for graduates from TCUST is 85%, far exceeding the national average of 40%. Complementing the formal education and training, local Tzu Chi volunteers act as “Tzu Chi Dads and Mums.” This plays a crucial role in providing mental and emotional support to the students, from the time they enter campus until they graduate, especially for those who come from single-parent or skip-generation families. Through these interactions, local volunteers instill Tzu Chi humanistic values and help alleviate students' anxiety of leaving home, which in turn lowers the dropout rate. The average graduation rate for indigenous students at TCUST is 75%. This is one of the examples that illustrates Tzu Chi's effort in empowering young women in marginalized communities, offering them support, and helping them secure a bright future, while simultaneously building community infrastructure.



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# Invest in Education and Breakdown Barriers



*Invest in the future generation and gender equality through providing education for all.*

**T**zu Chi's Charity and Education missions strongly believe that children are the hope of society and that education gives hope to children. When an area is affected by crises, the focus on reconstructing schools and providing essential supplies to students are often a top priority. For example, Tzu Chi volunteers dedicated themselves to reconstructing schools destroyed by Cyclone Idai in Mozambique. On January 31, 2024, Tzu Chi completed the construction of ESG Mafambisse, the largest secondary school in Mozambique. The school suffered extensive damage during Cyclone Idai, reducing the number of classrooms from 20 to 3. Now, the newly completed school has 58 classrooms and is equipped with modern amenities, such as computer and science labs. Additionally, the newly constructed library serves as a welcoming space to encourage students to read. This school now serves as a symbol of hope and resilience for Mozambique's youth. Tzu Chi is currently building 18 more schools in Mozambique, committed to bringing hope to

the younger generation and building a brighter future for the community.

Tzu Chi is dedicated to addressing all barriers to education, not just the physical aspect. Knowing that students' dropout rate due to family poverty and the caste system is extreme, Tzu Chi launched a Zero Dropout Programme in Lumbini, Nepal. By collaborating with school principals and teachers, Tzu Chi volunteers conduct home visits, convince parents to allow their children to go to schools, and provide material support such as uniforms, shoes, and school supplies to students. This initiative not only addresses immediate educational needs, but also promotes societal inclusion for vulnerable children. In addition, Tzu Chi initiated a vocational sewing course for women in the rural villages. Instead of being confined to household chores, these women can now sew clothes to generate income, transform their lives, help send their children to school, and break free from the cycle of poverty.



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# Assure Access to Quality Healthcare and Basic Sanitation

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*Provide universal access to healthcare and WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), ensuring a safety net for an adequate standard of living for all.*



Tzu Chi's Charity and Medical mission provides patient-centered medical care with compassion to underprivileged individuals regardless of religion, age, gender, ethnicity or ability to pay. Tzu Chi has various healthcare programs focused on providing community access to healthcare. These include health centers, mobile clinics, medical outreach, and healthy community programs. One example of Tzu Chi's commitment to families and women's healthcare can be seen through its partnership with hospitals and healthcare systems in underprivileged communities. With limited healthcare services in Burkina Faso leading to high maternal and neonatal mortality rates, urgent improvements are needed for pregnant women, postpartum mothers, and children. In conjunction with the national health development policies of Burkina Faso, one of Tzu Chi's hospitals jointly implemented the Maternal and Neonatal Health Care Improvement Project. Training courses for local health personnel were provided, and consultants were dispatched to Burkina Faso to assist and monitor workshops conducted by seed teachers. These efforts

ultimately enhanced caregiver capacity, upgraded the healthcare unit functionalities, and ensured essential healthcare for pregnant women and newborns in Burkina Faso.

Another aspect of improving healthcare standards is having access to clean water and sanitation. Tzu Chi has been actively contributing to this cause, and one of its efforts can be seen in the recent collaboration with other foundations to construct solar-powered water wells in Sierra Leone. This initiative aligns with the government's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal to ensure access to clean water and sanitation for all. By providing these wells, Tzu Chi brings much-needed relief to communities that had previously endured long and arduous journeys in order to fetch water. More importantly, the wells have had profound social, psychological, and economic impact to women (who are most likely to engage in household chores), their families, and to their community, thereby significantly improving overall well-being and quality of life.



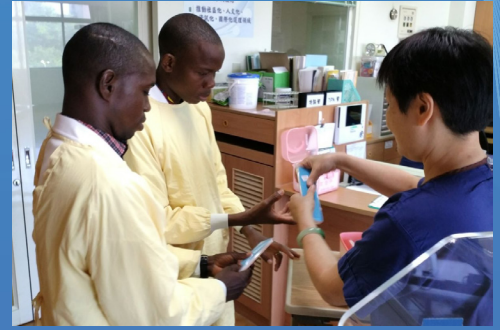
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## Conclusion



The examples above highlight Tzu Chi's unwavering commitment towards women empowerment and gender equality. Through various internal efforts and collaborations with other governments and organizations, we strive towards creating a more resilient, caring and sustainable world. In these efforts, we hope to cultivate a more inclusive and equitable society where women and girls are empowered to thrive and as a result their families and communities will also thrive. As we continue our journey towards gender equality, our focus on compassion is key, guiding us as we strive to create positive change and build a brighter future for all.

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*With perseverance and courage, the roughest roads can become smooth.*

*~Jing Si Aphorism by Dharma Master Cheng Yen*

### Works Cited

<sup>1</sup> UN Women and United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "The Gender Snapshot 2023." Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals, <https://bit.ly/gender-snapshot-2023>.

<sup>2</sup>United Nations. "Ending Poverty." United Nations | Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ending-poverty>.



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