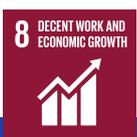


IMPACT SHEET: Pride on our Plates

Strengthening China's MSMEs through proven food waste solutions and behavioural insights



Promote adoption of more resource-efficient processes and services among MSMEs, including an actual reduction of food waste



PROJECT BACKGROUND

Waste in China's food service sector is severe. According to "A Report on Food Waste in the Food and Beverage Industry of Chinese Cities" published by WWF China and China Academy of Sciences, total food waste in China's urban restaurant industry was 17-18 million tons in 2015. This is equivalent to wasting 330,000 hectares of arable land and 1.36 billion cubic meters of water. Further, China's food security and growing middle-class lifestyle is of particular concern for the world, with roughly 20% of the world's population but only 7% of its arable land.

CHALLENGE

China has a population of 1.4 billion people, a sufficient food supply and a well-designed waste management system are essential to building a sustainable food consumption market in this vast country. If wealth continues to grow in China, food waste is likely to increase, which is a trend seen in many developing countries. But there is a change on the horizon: food service providers are beginning to understand the importance of combating waste in order to reduce business costs, protect the environment, and meet increasing customer demand for more sustainable operations. Chinese government has been taking measures in recent years to improve its waste management system nation-wide by calling for "Zero-Waste City" pilots. However, MSMEs (micro, small and medium-sized enterprises) which make up 97% of China's enterprises fall into a critical "gap" because they are often not the target audience for food waste reduction resources or campaigns. This project aims to close that gap by empowering China's MSMEs to respond to the food waste challenge. Simply put, reducing and better managing food waste is one of the easiest and most effective ways to mitigate the environmental impact of our food system and sustainably feed our communities.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Catalyse the prevention, reduction, and diversion of food waste among MSMEs in China's hospitality sector.

The specific objectives include:

- To promote adoption of more resource-efficient processes and services among MSMEs, including an actual reduction of food waste
- To develop a Food Waste Policy Proposal to increase awareness on Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP) and distil knowledge for wider replication, enhance policy dialogues, and support strengthening policies related to curbing food waste
- To support sustainable consumption and consumer awareness on SCP by training MSMEs to use a Behaviour-Centred Design (BCD) approach to food waste reduction, and widely disseminating information to businesses and consumers.

TARGET GROUPS

- **Primary target group:** MSMEs in China's hospitality and food services sector, including restaurants, hotels, caterers, food courts, food service providers, and start-up companies.
- **Secondary target groups:** Consumers, business intermediaries and service providers (e.g. industry associations, research institutions, chambers of commerce), and regional government entities.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

1. Collect best practices and synthesize insights from successful food waste programs and analyses, and behavioural insights and design;
2. Develop and implement tailored curricula and regional trainings for MSMEs;
3. Implement pilots with MSMEs to develop, test, and measure food waste reduction practices and innovations;
4. Develop a policy framework to support implementation of SDG 12.3 to advocate for and incentivize food waste prevention and diversion;
5. Launch a consumer engagement campaign around food waste in 5 regions;
6. Disseminate lessons learned at high-level conferences; mainstream findings into relevant policy processes and sectors; link with UNEP One Planet Network Sustainable Food Systems and Consumer Information Programs.

LESSONS LEARNED

COVID-19: The impact of COVID-19 was felt especially hard by the hospitality industry. When restaurants reopened, many MSMEs were required to focus their attentions on reestablishing profitable operations. As such, in these cases there was limited capacity to commit to a program focussed on food waste reductions, rather than engaging in new actions that were not considered business critical.

Capacity limitations: In some cases, MSMEs felt they were unable to commit the staff time to the program. During the competitive selection process, we sought to assess if MSMEs were able to commit the pilot duration and required managerial/operational support to fully benefit from the support offered by the project.

Unexpected dropouts: given that the economic downturn has greatly impacted the catering industry, 4 pilots dropped out during implementation, they either went bankrupt or had other issues to close the store, 3 new pilots were recruited to fill the gap. To note that there are also 2 restaurants who went bankrupt even though they have completed the pilot.

Development projects often face business engagement challenges, the project offers some insights. A combined strategy of business engagement can be used to boost business participation. (1) Associations and government bodies are pivotal in promoting participation and legitimacy. (2) Training is effective in recruitment of pilots (54% of trained restaurants transitioned to pilot participation), demonstrating a noted participating rate. (3) Shift from one-to-one outreach to cluster-based recruitment (e.g., Tianmuli business district) improved efficiency and fostered collaboration (4) For places where the industry associations absent, restaurants facing highly competitive markets, like those in Shanghai, future efforts should focus on direct incentives. These could include connecting with sustainability-focused customers, eco-tourism agencies, cruise companies, prestigious international schools, and leveraging high-profile events to amplify impact. To enhance future project outcomes, the following lessons learnt are summarized:

- For improved project design, consider incorporating additional indicators at both the output and outcome levels to reflect long-term shifts in MSMEs' internal management decisions, customer attitudes, and governmental initiatives.
- Develop operational manuals tailored to the unique characteristics of each subsector to ensure that guidance is more relevant and effective, thereby enhancing the project's overall effectiveness.
- Continue exploring effective methods for measuring food waste reduction outcomes, accounting for business fluctuations and other variables.
- Ensure accurate baseline data for impact measurement.
- Sustain fundraising efforts to maintain project momentum, including keeping the monitoring app operational, continuing to engage and monitor business performance, and expanding public education campaigns to achieve a widespread shift in consumer attitudes and habits towards food waste reduction.

PROJECT ACHIEVEMENT

From 2020 to 2024, the project successfully catalysed the prevention, reduction, and diversion of food waste among MSMEs in China's hospitality sector. Through targeted interventions, MSMEs adopted resource-efficient processes, reduced food waste, and enhanced sustainable consumption practices. Key achievements include:

- MSMEs engaged by the project have integrated sustainable food waste management practices, resulting in tangible reductions in food waste. In total 383 MSMEs participated in trainings on food waste prevention, reduction and diversion practices. In total 100 MSMEs successfully implemented sustainable consumption and production practices.
- A Food Waste Policy Proposal named Implementation of Food Waste Reduction Policy in Chinese Catering Industry and Pilot Cities Case Sharing was developed, increasing awareness of Sustainable Consumption and Production (SCP), fostering policy dialogue, and promoting wider adoption of best practices among policy makers, catering industry and MSMEs.

- MSMEs engaged for training and pilots were trained in Behaviour-Centred Design (BCD) approaches to food waste reduction, with information disseminated widely to businesses and consumers. In total 458 MSME staff received training in food waste prevention, reduction, and diversion techniques. In total 50 MSMEs in the hospitality and food services sector reduced their food waste by at least 10%. And more than 60% of the pilot restaurants achieved over a 20% reduction in food waste, while 22% of the restaurants reduced food waste by more than 50%, significantly exceeding the project's initial targets.
- One national industry association (China Hospitality Association) and five regional industry associations endorsed the MSME Food Waste Practical Guide, recommending its adoption to members and inspiring broader sector-wide replication.
- Through a series of communication and public engagement activities, reached and influenced over 61 million consumers.
- The project was successfully selected as one of the six global finalists for the 2025 Food Planet Prize in May 2025. Established by the Swedish Curt Bergfors Foundation, this award is one of the world's largest environmental prizes, with a primary focus on innovative practices in the food system.

The project has achieved extensive and ground-breaking achievements, making successful interventions in policy, sector and consumer perspective to address the challenge of reducing food waste. It empowered 50 micro, small and medium-sized restaurants across 5 cities to reduce food waste by over 30% in average in 10-week piloting with data-driven solutions and social behavioral change models. The project's tools and deliverables have supported the development of sector standard that is endorsed by Chinese central government policy. Millions of consumers have been engaged through diversified innovative public interaction patterns. This project has its distinctive feature highlighting quantitative measuring tools combing with highly lively events. Beneficiaries' gains from the project are enormous, besides tangible gains of food waste reduction through the monitoring tool and anti-food reduction measures, enhanced awareness and capability, the intangible benefits include recognition from own staff which helps staff retaining, customer loyalty, enhanced brand reputation and even industry leadership recognition.

In summary, MSMEs in China's hospitality and food services sector are now better equipped to manage and reduce food waste, setting a strong foundation for continued industry-wide sustainability efforts.



Xin Yu
WWF China



Every day in restaurants, chefs take pride in the dishes they serve—but too often, good food is lost along the way. Through the EU SWITCH-Asia *Pride on Our Plates* project, we work side by side with restaurants to change that story. From practical kitchen solutions to behavioral nudges for diners, we show that every ingredient has value. What began in a few pilot restaurants is now helping industry to shape standards, informing policy discussions, and helping shift dining culture—so reducing food waste becomes a shared source of pride across China’s catering sector.



Long-term sustainability

The project has effectively built capacity on MSMEs through training sessions and piloting programme. Continuation of anti-food waste agenda will be determined by government regulations business’s own sustainability agenda. Under years of efforts for reducing food waste from all parties, a social atmosphere of valuing conservation and thrift is under shaping. However, sustained awareness campaigns, public education initiatives, and incentives to reinforce anti-waste norms so as to keep the public continually be reminded of the importance of food waste reduction.

Project contributions to Climate Change Mitigation and SDGs

The project’s overall objective is to contribute to SDG 12.3 by catalysing reduction and better management of food waste in the MSME hospitality sector. This directly contributes to the Switch Asia call for proposals’ global objective to “promote inclusive sustainable growth, to contribute to the economic prosperity and poverty reduction in Asia and Central Asia, and to support the development of a green economy and the transition towards a low-carbon, resource-efficient and circular economy.”

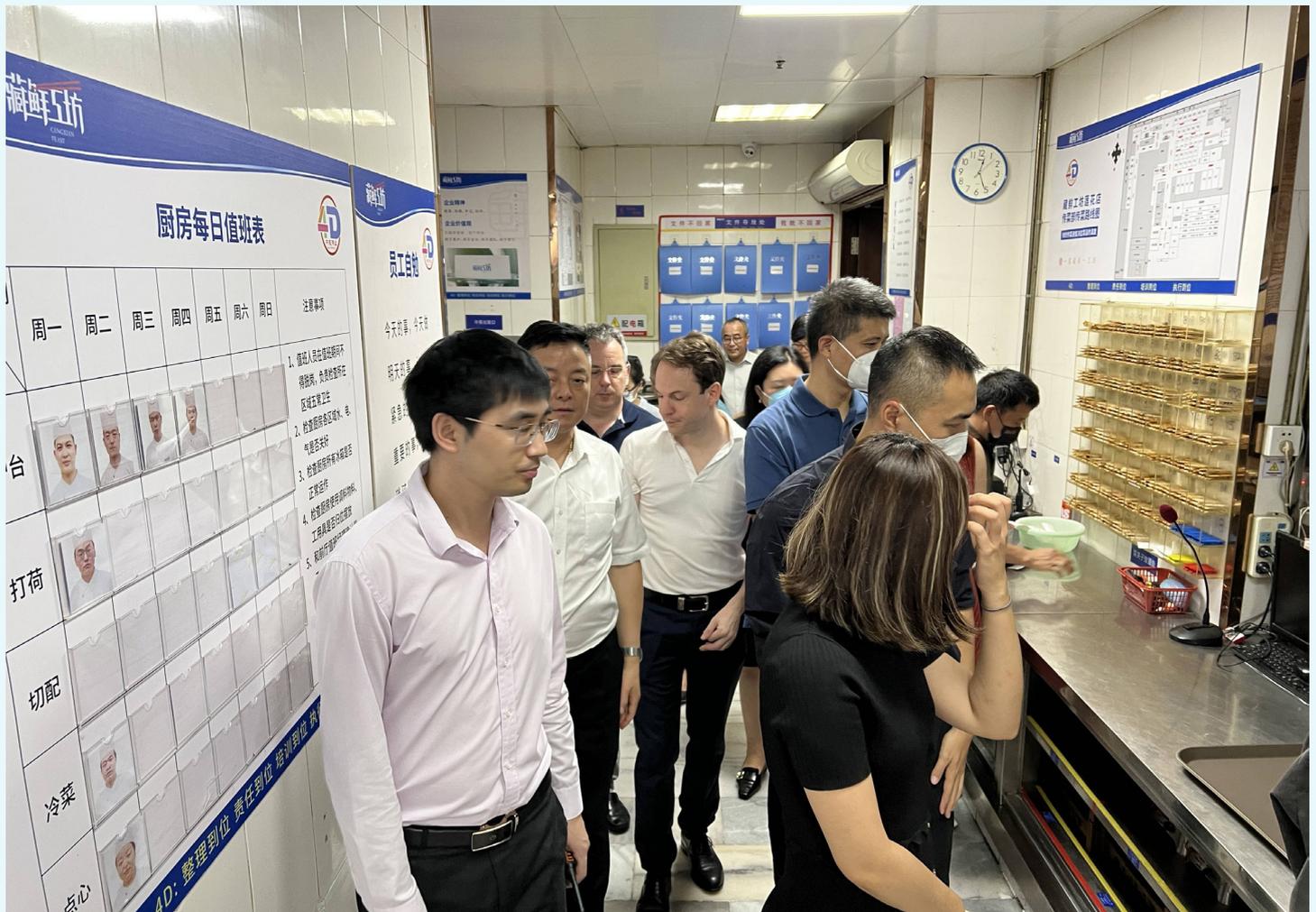
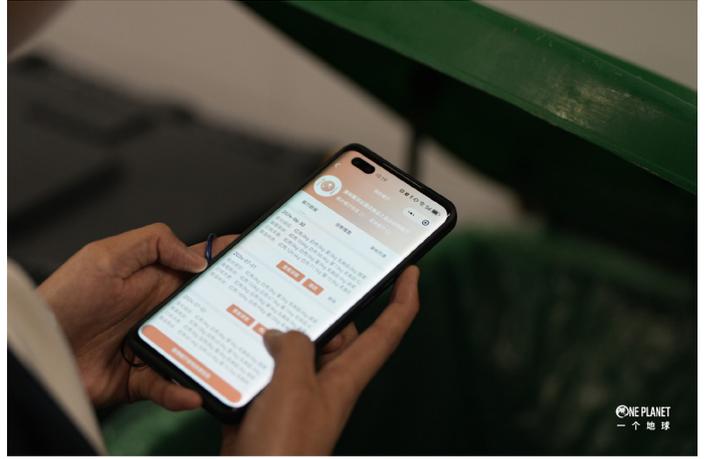


Photo Gallery





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DURATION

2020 - Dec 2024



PARTNERS



One Planet Foundation (OPF)



World Wide Fund for Nature Beijing



Rare China Center for Behavior



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