Big Push For Participatory Development:
The Canada-China Project in Shanxi

Farmers in Fanship Village, Zuoquan County, speaking about their needs and hopes.

The Canada-China Integrated Rural Development Poverty Reduction Project has recently been launched in Ningxia, Gansu, Shanxi and Guizhou, four of the poorest provinces in China. Project participants include the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation (MOFTEC), the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) and the Amity Foundation. In September 1999, Theresa Carino visited three villages in Shanxi that are part of this effort and reports on her impressions in this article.

In Shanxi’s Jinzhong Prefecture, 300,000 out of 3 million inhabitants live below the poverty line. This is not surprising given the inhospitable terrain. Nestled in the mountains between Shanxi and Hebei Provinces, Heshun and Zuoquan counties were guerilla bases during the Anti-Japanese War (1937-45) and part of the “liberated areas” during the Chinese Revolution. Conditions have improved since 1949 but villages have not quite shaken off their poverty. Roads leading to Fangshan, Baihe and Xin Anzhuang villages in these counties pass through narrow valleys sandwiched between steep mountains. Amazingly, apple trees, maize, millet, oats and tomatoes abound wherever strips of cultivable land can be found amidst rocks and stones, but surface soil is thin and easily washed away by heavy rains. The aridity and lack of cultivable land in these areas pose formidable obstacles to development.

Individual households will benefit

Mr. Yu Wen Youyu, Director of the Poverty Alleviation Office of Jinzhong Prefecture, who has been in his job for 13 years, said that previous government projects were designed without the people’s participation. “They often fail to obtain the desired results. For instance, when we distribute funds to farmers, they are wasted on things..."
unrelated to the projects.” Village enterprises producing bricks and simple farm implements failed in the 80s due to the lack of farm-to-market roads. Farmers did not have enough education and management skills. Projects, such as afforestation, benefited the collective but did not mean more income for farmers.

“The Canada-China project is different because it is based on farmers’ needs. It will directly benefit the individual households, not just the collective,” says Yu Wen, who is Deputy Director of the project in Shanxi Province. More important, the participatory method in development is being given a big push in this project. The approach is being used on a large scale in the four provinces of Shanxi, Guizhou, Ningxia and Gansu for the first time and involves provincial, prefectural and county level leaders.

During the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) Workshop conducted by Amity in Heshun and Zuoquan counties in July and August 1999, discussions involving villagers, local leaders and officials were organized. In these interactive sessions, the farmers articulated their needs and learned how to prioritize and plan. Priorities include water catchment areas for potable water, wells and water cellars (for storing water). Villagers had many suggestions—including literacy and skills training for young wives (who have joined the village community through marriage) rather than for young single women who would eventually move out of the village after marriage.

The data collected from villagers through the participatory method has been very extensive. Ninety-six households in Zuoquan and Heshun counties have been selected as the focus of the project in its preliminary stages. Their development will be closely monitored and comparative studies made with the same households every year. Planning is being done systematically based on goals set by the people themselves.

**Farmers speak up**

Villagers have been encouraged to speak up. “We need water for drinking and irrigation,” stressed 35-year-old Li Gaiping when I asked about village needs and priorities. “We also need a school and a clinic!” chimed in her neighbors. Eight women were gathered in a circle under a tree in front of the Fanshang Village Committee office in Zuoquan County. They were eager to speak, to share their needs and their hopes. At my request, local officials kept a respectful distance, away from earshot, so the women villagers could speak freely. But I need not have worried; the women showed few inhibitions either with the local officials or me.

They were very open about their complaints and also their dreams for the future. “If I had some money,” said one, “I would like to start a tailoring shop.” Others wanted to rear pigs or raise cows. But money is so scarce that villagers engage in barter trade for some of their daily needs. I watched Li Gaiping exchanging a bag of corn for apples sold by a woman from another village. When I asked the women who controlled the finances in the family, they snorted, “We don’t have money so there’s nothing to manage and we never have to quarrel with our husbands about it!” Most of the women had “married upwards” into Fanshang Village from even poorer villages.

At the schoolhouse in Baibei Village, Heshun County, I had another discussion with 20 women. Again, they expressed the desperate need for water. The scarcity and poor quality of water has led to a high incidence of intestinal and women’s diseases in the village. Farmers do their laundry in the same stagnant pool, so disease is easily transmitted. During drought, they have to buy water from other villages. In Xin Anzhuang Village, Heshun County, families spend as much as 3 RMB (40 US cents) daily to buy water from a source 5 kilometers away. When there is no drought, the main source of water is an open, polluted village pond.

**Transforming attitudes**

The participatory approach is beginning to make waves. Director Yu Wen was initially skeptical about the PRA Workshop. People from different social and educational backgrounds participated: technical support staff, administrators, researchers and farmers. Yu Wen could not imagine how such a mixed group of people could be trained together. After going
through the workshop, he thinks it is a great experience: "Even the farmers who were illiterate raised good questions!"

During the Workshop, technical consultants and local officials had to visit villages and listen to farmers. Su Chunying from the Zuoquan Agricultural Bureau enthused, "It's a good learning experience. We learned that farmers have trouble with healthcare and in many places, need a midwife. I was very moved by a story in Guaier Township: One farmer has to travel 10 kilometers every day to fetch water. Once, after arriving home with a big bucket of water, he tripped and spill all of it! He cried the whole day. Because water is so scarce, health conditions are very bad too."

Huangfu Suya, a researcher from the Zuoquan Education Bureau acknowledged: "The participatory method is good because it allows the farmers to express themselves. I noticed how bad conditions in schools are. Pupils have to bring their own stools from home. Schoolhouses have leaking roofs and children from three grades share the same classroom. Farmers have very little to eat. Their diet consists mainly of corn, potatoes and vegetables. They eat rice, wheat and meat only on special occasions."

**Micro-credit system to be developed**

In all three villages I visited, the farmers' main income is from the sale of corn and potatoes. They would like to breed animals as a source of additional income but need water and the money to buy feeds. In Xin Anzhuang Village, each household owns an average of five animals (sheep, goats, pigs or cows). Forty-two-year-old Xu Wenchang is an exception. She was given a loan from the poverty reduction office and used it to buy calves. She was able to repay the 2,000 RMB (US$ 250) loan in two years and now has 11 cows. After selling two cows, she has reinvested the money in more calves!

Li Gaiping of Fanshang Village is illiterate but can add, subtract and multiply rather well. She has three children but her eldest daughter, who is now 18, had to stop schooling because of poverty. "When we need cash, we borrow from our relatives," she explained. She will be able to borrow from another source in future. Developing a micro-credit system among the women is part of the project plan—so they can learn how to save for enterprises. It could lay the foundation for a village banking system or a "self-development organization" that does not yet exist.

**Strengthening Amity's institutional capacity**

The Amity Foundation is involved in all aspects of the Canada-China Poverty Reduction Project including planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Its participation in such a major bilateral government project illustrates the growing importance of NGOs in development work in China. The project has given a higher profile to Amity both nationally and internationally and it is hoped that this will strengthen Amity’s institutional capacity. Three new staff have been hired for this project and Amity is expanding its circle of consultants and technical experts. Prof. Liu Lin, an Associate Professor from the China Agriculture University, facilitated PRA Workshops in all four provinces. According to Qiu Zhong Hui, Director of Amity’s Rural Development Division, Prof. Liu admits that his work has continually improved because of the constant feedback from Amity staff. Workshop sessions are interactive, a stark contrast to the top-down lecture-style approach that is prevalent in China. The sessions have benefited not only Amity staff but also experts, local officials, leaders and farmers.

The project’s participatory approach and Amity’s involvement is expected to ensure greater accountability and transparency in its implementation. Director Yu Wen speaks glowingly of the dedication and sincerity of Amity staff he has encountered. According to him, "This project will succeed because it has people’s participation. Moreover, the key in poverty alleviation work is: Yao dui remin you ganqing (You must empathize with the people.) Amity staff have lots of it!"  

Theresa Carino

Breeding cows can bring additional income: Xu Wenchang (2nd from R), talks about her successful venture.
When AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) was first reported in the West, the Chinese rejoiced at their physical distance from the incurable, fatal disease. This optimism did not last long. The first AIDS case in China was reported in 1985. By the end of September 1999, HIV-positive cases have been reported in every one of the 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities in China. The total number has reached 15,088. Most HIV-infected persons live in the countryside. Among the reported cases, 477 have developed full blown AIDS and 240 have already died. To date, the real HIV-positive population is estimated to be over 400,000. Cases are increasing at such a dramatic rate that medical experts expect the figure to reach one million by the year 2000.

The 14 years since the first reported case of HIV/AIDS in 1985 can be divided into three phases. The first phase, from 1985 to 1988, was characterized by a small number of "imported cases". The majority of infected persons during this time were foreigners or overseas Chinese.

The second phase, between 1989 and 1993, can be described as a limited epidemic. It started in October 1989 when 146 drug users in southwest Yunnan Province were tested positive for HIV. During this period, the majority of reported HIV infections in China were among drug users in Yunnan. At the same time, a small number of HIV infections were reported among STD* patients, sex-workers and laborers returning from overseas.

The third phase started in late 1994 when HIV transmission spread beyond Yunnan Province. The national figure for HIV infection grew dramatically with a considerable number reported among drug users and commercial plasma donors from various regions. Increasing numbers of drug-related HIV infections were reported in the provinces of Sichuan, Xinjiang, and Guangxi. At the same time, HIV infection through sexual contact increased.

The overall figure of reported HIV infections remains relatively low, and is concentrated in particular areas, the majority of them rural. However, the routes of transmission now cover broad areas of the country. All indications point to a major epidemic in the near future.

People infected with HIV come from all occupations, but many are farmers, returned migrant workers, unemployed people and businessmen. Young adults account for most of the infections: 80.6% of reported HIV carriers are aged between 20 to 40 of which 58% are aged between 20-29 and 22.6% between 30-39. Males outnumber females five to one. (I'm trying to avoid too many detailed statistics)

The leading cause is believed to be intravenous drug use, with infected drug users constituting 71.7% of reported AIDS cases. With prostitution and the practice of having mistresses spreading across the country, heterosexual contact is now the second main cause. Other factors contributing to the spread of HIV/AIDS is a huge population of 160 million migrant workers, blood donation, and the inadequate control of infections within a poor health care system.

Although China is still a country with relatively low HIV prevalence, it is clear that the situation is becoming more serious. Since 1994, the spread of HIV/AIDS has accelerated to almost epidemic proportions, affecting all sectors of society. In the first three quarters of 1999, the HIV-positive population increased by 33.3%. Yunnan, Xinjiang, Guangxi, Henan and Sichuan are the most affected areas. Controlling its spread now is critical and both the Chinese government and NGOs are making concerted and painstaking efforts to do so.

The Amity Foundation started a three-year AIDS Education Program in 1996. Implemented in the three counties of Longquan, Fengqing, and Lincang in Yunnan Province, the purpose of the program is to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and to prevent its spread through the distribution of educational materials on the disease.

The program offers training courses for AIDS educators at the county, township, and village levels. AIDS education materials such as pamphlets, textbooks and posters are distributed and AIDS prevention knowledge is transmitted
China: Amity’s Response

through mass media including radio, television, films, videos, school blackboards and publicly posted slogans. House-to-house visits are made to ensure that people, both infected and uninfected, are educated.

The program has won much praise from local and foreign experts as well as from the people and the local governments. In the final evaluation of the program, which was successfully completed at the end of 1998, the following conclusions were made:

1) Community education and intervention are still the most effective ways to actively control the spread of HIV/AIDS.
2) A core of AIDS educators at various levels, from county to village, is needed to successfully implement the program.
3) An administrative organizational body at various levels is needed to ensure there will be a leading body to design, implement, monitor, and evaluate the project.
4) House-to-house visits, combined with meetings, the distribution of pamphlets, posters, videos and broadcasts, are effective ways to control the spread of HIV/AIDS in both rural and urban areas.
5) It is very important to pay more attention to high-risk groups such as long distance drivers, bar employees and drug users. They need to be educated and have regular check-ups.

Amity is determined to continue the AIDS Education Program in Yunnan and to try and expand it to other parts of China if funds can be secured. The program and Amity’s participation in it has not only benefited local villagers but has mobilized government departments to invest more resources for the prevention of AIDS.

(*)STD: Sexually transmitted disease

Zhang Liwei

Taking AIDS Education One Step Further
An Interview with Li Enlin*

Is the Amity AIDS education project any different from other similar projects in China?
Amity’s project is a pilot project. The UNDP had a similar program but it only reached the county level. The Amity project takes AIDS education all the way down to the grassroots: to the county, township and village levels.

The method employed was not just training AIDS educators. Getting government participation was most important to make it successful. Initial training was given by the Provincial AIDS Prevention Office of Yunnan. This is different from other provinces in that provincial leaders are the group leaders. It shows the degree of importance given to the project. Leaders had slogans about AIDS on their office walls—not a very popular thing to do. Most officials are fearful that news or information about AIDS will keep tourists and other people away from the county.

In all three counties (Longquan, Fengqing and Lincang in Yunnan Province) the Vice-Magistrate became the head of the leading group which also included officials from education, health, publicity, security bureaus, the youth league, the women’s federation and trade unions. These top officials then assumed responsibility for educating people in their departments. At the township level, a leading group was also set up.

What methods are used to disseminate information?
Schools are important centers for information dissemination. Parents are invited to school meetings where they are shown videotapes on AIDS. In the project areas, AIDS education has become incorporated into the school curriculum.

In our pilot project, household-to-household education was carried out very successfully. Educators are usually village heads, women leaders and health workers. They distribute pamphlets to each household then fingerprint the family members. This provides a way of monitoring whether work has been implemented at the grassroots and to ensure that more than 80% of the population in the project areas learn about AIDS.

We also provide education at drug detoxification centers where 70% of inmates are HIV-positive. Some of them tell us that they could have avoided contracting HIV had they known the facts earlier.
AIDS patients and those who are known to be HIV-positive are often treated as social outcasts. What is being done to change attitudes?

We have to overcome the shame associated with AIDS/HIV. There is one HIV-infected person that Amity is trying to encourage to tell his story, but he is willing to do it only in a different county.

Most people shun HIV-carriers and AIDS patients but there are a few encouraging stories. There is the case of Ye Han, a prostitute, who had returned from Thailand after having been infected with AIDS. Because she was very charming and attractive, men refused to believe she had AIDS and continued to "patronize" her. Amity had hoped that she would tell her story but she died before doing so. During the three months leading to her death, her newly wed sister-in-law took care of her. "She's a human being. If I can't help her, no one will," Ye's sister-in-law explained. There are many who would have shunned her for fear of being infected. Amity hopes that the sister-in-law, Wu Li, can tell her story to convince others that one can show compassion and not be infected.

What will the second phase of Amity's AIDS project emphasize?

The second phase of the project will emphasize caring for AIDS patients and aims to change attitudes towards HIV-carriers. There are many AIDS education promoters who still dread breaking the bad news to people tested positive for HIV and to their families. They fear retaliation and even violence from victims and their families when they are given the bad news. Very often in the past, they would rather not inform victims that they have been infected with AIDS. This, of course, aggravates the problem.

I remember the story of one AIDS education promoter, Mr. Li Ji. He told us that he once had to inform someone that he had been infected with AIDS. When he came face-to-face with the patient and his family, he was trembling so much, he could barely speak. The patient was a drug addict and an only child. His parents refused to believe the news. Finally, the patient broke the ice by asking if he could still get married. This reaction was a great relief to Li and he was encouraged by it.

The second phase of our project will concentrate on communities with HIV infected persons. It will aim at helping communities to accept them and to provide better care for those who have been tested HIV-positive and then to use this as a model. We will be working in four counties. One of them, Chenjiang county, is a tourist spot in Yunnan. In the "red light district", there are more than 20 dancing halls. AIDS educators will work with the bar girls there. The owners of the dance halls have agreed to it. The project began in July '99 and is expected to end in 2001.

(Li Enlin, an Associate General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, is also the Director of Amity's Medical Division. Ms. Li was interviewed by Theresa Carino about Amity's AIDS Project in September 1999.)

Is there a future for non-governmental organizations in China?

(This article is an excerpt from a paper entitled "NGOs and their future" delivered by Prof. Zhu Chuanyi, research fellow of the American Studies Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences at the Board of Director's meeting of the Amity Foundation in April 1999. Prof. Zhu is a new member of Amity's Board of Directors.)

Eighteen years after the first Chinese foundation or NGO was established in 1981, China has fewer than 1,000 foundations of which only about 100 are registered with the central government. This figure is very low compared with those in Asia or the West. Management, fundraising and other activities of Chinese NGOs may lag far behind those in many other countries but their role is already widely appreciated because they:

1) Mobilize material and human resources to complement the Chinese government in social development work and, in the process, contribute transparency and accountability to the utilization of financial resources.

2) Help direct public attention to the great number of social problems and promote social reforms, prompting concerted efforts to build a more civilized, just, democratic, and harmonious society.

3) Play an active role in building "a small government and a big society" and in forging a new kind of relationship among people.
Can Chinese NGOs succeed under present socio-economic conditions?

The answer is “Yes!” In academic circles, it is acknowledged that the China Youth Development Foundation (a spin-off from Project Hope) and the Amity Foundation are the two outstanding Chinese foundations that have made great achievements over the years. Part of Amity’s success may be attributed to its ability to constantly adjust principles and strategies in response to socio-economic developments and changes.

For instance, Amity’s focus has shifted from supporting poor households, villages, and townships to emphasizing the participation and involvement of local governments and other social groups. This is aimed at optimizing the deployment of social resources and building “civil society.” Amity used to stress “material development” but now pays equal attention to the promotion of new concepts and ideas such as self-reliance, mutual support, equality, self-protection, and democratic participation.

Ingredients for success

Some say Amity’s success rests upon reliable funds from overseas but is this the only factor? It is true that no foundation can last without reliable funding sources. However, I think staff have played a decisive role in the success of the Amity Foundation. Only people with commitment can fully shoulder the responsibility of planning and implementing projects commensurate with the needs of the target groups. Through strict management regulations, Amity has trained a contingent of professionals in its field work.

Amity has also won trust from friends at home and abroad so that they are willing to make contributions to Amity and become long term supporters of its work. If a foundation lacks supervision and accountability and donors do not know how money has been used and the impact it has generated, people will stop making further donations.

As an organization, Amity operates under the same “external” [political and social] conditions as other NGOs in China, and therefore enjoys no advantage over them. Internally, however, Amity may have certain advantages. For example, Amity has a different management approach. Amity staff do not order grass-roots organizations around like bureaucrats but consult with local partners to reach a consensus. Foundations that are run through a set of administrative orders will not gain the people’s enthusiastic support over the long term. Measures that demand people’s contributions or a “messianic” approach to helping the poor do not work.

Amity has put great emphasis on staff development. Amity not only trains her staff to fully participate in social practice but also creates opportunities for them to take part in international workshops and seminars to gain international experience.

After 14 years, Amity boasts not only of a contingent of committed staff but also a wide circle of support groups that include members of its board of directors, members of various committees, volunteers, funding partners at home and abroad, beneficiaries in rural and urban areas, government officials at various levels, professionals, journalists, and writers. These people are the gems of the Amity Foundation. The work and activities of Amity, including decision making, cannot be separated from their support. This support is the catalyst for the implementation of Amity’s “mission”. It is Amity’s duty to forge the ideals of these support groups into long-term objectives so as to maintain support from them in terms of material, human and spiritual resources.

What is the future for NGOs?

Historically, in China, public welfare enterprises were run by the government while non-governmental efforts were limited to individual charitable acts. “Non-governmental organizations” is a foreign concept. However, China does have a long history of the participation of social elites and local gentry in public welfare. The development of the “granaries or storehouse” system represents progression from a purely governmental operation to a non-governmental operation with governmental assistance. But the process took 1,000 years from the Han to the Sung Dynasty.

Earlier, the Chinese government had proposed the idea of “small government, big state”. In recent years, with structural reforms in government, some of its functions and responsibilities have been relegated to society at large. Increasingly, scholars and experts tend to agree that government, enterprises, and non-profit organizations should collaborate in building up the social security network so that the full potential of all sectors can be tapped. There will be a phenomenal growth in non-governmental, non-profit organizations and foundations. Their further development will rest upon the “partnership” between the government, market and non-profit sectors.
Yixing Community Based Rehab Project Evaluated

Amity’s Blindness Prevention and Special Education Division conducted an external evaluation of the Yixing Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Project from November 15 to 28, 1999. The project’s rehabilitation services, training programs and management system were assessed. Included in the evaluation team were experts from China and overseas. They interviewed 60 randomly selected project beneficiaries.

“The project has made a very positive impact on the lives of project beneficiaries by giving them greater independence, helping them become more independent when appropriate and increasing their social integration into society,” commented the experts at the close of the evaluation. They also made valuable suggestions such as reviewing previous cases to see if more services were needed by blind clients; exploring more vocational options; developing better sign language skills; placing more emphasis on early intervention services for children; making better use of and developing more local resources; and strengthening short in-service training and support system.

The Yixing CBR Project, the first of its kind in China, was launched in 1994 by Amity with financial and technical support from the Christofel Blindenmission International (CBM). By October 1999, the project had served 194 people with visual impairments, 113 with hearing impairments and 53 with moving impairments. With the experience and lessons drawn from this project, Amity started its second CBR project in Luzhou, Sichuan Province in 1997.

Shower of Love

“Shower of Love on Orphans,” a collection of feature stories on several orphanage workers, has recently been published (in Chinese) by Amity. In the preface to the book, Dr. Han Wenzao, Amity’s General Secretary, wrote, “We have made very small contributions to the work of the welfare institutes. What we have given can never exceed what we have learned from these social workers who have quietly devoted their lives to welfare work.”

Amity works with over 40 orphanages all over China, helping them with the rehabilitation, health care and education of orphaned children, especially those with physical and mental handicaps. The book “Shower of Love on Orphans” is a record of the life of several social workers: a testimony of their worries, struggles, passion, and hopes.

The stories in this collection were written by Mr. Zhang Zhengji, a retired government office worker, who spent a year and a half collecting stories, interviewing social workers and writing up the manuscript. He has since left Amity, but his work exemplifies the voluntarism in Amity.