The Sweet Taste of Success
Integrated Rural Development In Xuyi County

Nestled between the River Huai and Lake Hongze, Xuyi County is one of Jiangsu's poorer counties. 90% of the county's population are peasants, many of whom still live below the poverty line. In April 2001, some of Amity's Board of Directors visited an integrated rural development project in the area. Katrin Fiedler, Editor of Amity Newsletter, accompanied them.

Hu Guqing with daughter-in-law Sun Cuixia.

Broad smiles greet Amity's board members on their visit to Wangdian Township's strawberry farmers. The look on their beaming faces is project evaluation at its easiest: the villagers are obviously happy. Yet, for Wangdian's peasants, it is only recently that hard times have become a thing of the past.

Big floods in 1991 helped the Amity Foundation discover Xuyi County, a pocket of poverty right on the border of Jiangsu and Anhui provinces. "Amity assisted the flood victims through relief work," recounts Qiu Zhonghui, head of Amity's Rural Development Division. "Local production capacities and peasants' incomes were very low. The area was also poor and backward not only in economic terms. On one mountain, we found a family with nine children."

Amity started to implement some individual projects to improve the peasants' living and production conditions, but the results were less than ideal. "It took us some time to realize that here, only an integrated approach tackling several problems at a time would yield results. Moreover, human development is the most crucial aspect in the poverty alleviation process" Qiu explains. In 1996, an integrated rural development project was started in Wangdian Township, Xuyi County. Wangdian Integrated Rural Development Project includes training programs, an irrigation project with pumping stations, an afforestation project, upgrading of schools and village clinics, a microcredit project and an experimental garden. Through these combined efforts, basic health, education and economic needs are addressed.
Dramatic Increase Of Income
Perhaps Wangdian's most interesting project element is the experimental garden and its strawberry cultivation.

Low agricultural output and the poor quality of local produce in Wangdian were mainly due to ecological constraints. Scarcity of arable land, lack of water and soil erosion hampered agricultural production, and farmers lacked the skills and capital to develop other economic opportunities. In close cooperation with local partners, Amity started to look into agricultural alternatives. Traditional land use tended to aggravate existing ecological problems. The aim was to find a form of agriculture that would be both ecologically sustainable and economically profitable.

Strawberries proved to be the ideal solution. Grown in huge hothouse tents, strawberries can be cultivated from December to June and give high returns over relatively small areas of land. What is more, Wangdian's strawberries are grown without artificial pesticides or fertilizer, winning them official recognition as "organic strawberries." As such, they are sold for six to eight RMB Yuan per kilo [= US$ 0.75 - 1.00] and have proven to be a great hit with China's increasingly health-conscious consumers.

For local farmers, the strawberry project has also proved to be a runaway success. Xu Kaiwen, a 45-year old farmer, reports: "I have four daughters. Three of them are now studying in school. In the past, I always felt so embarrassed to borrow money or ask the school to reduce tuition fees at the beginning of each semester. But this year I have paid everything myself. Since January, I have already earned more than 10,000 Yuan!" Other villagers echo his enthusiasm. Hu Guiqing is a woman in her forties: "Before we started the project, our family income was less than 2000 Yuan [= US$ 250] per year. This strawberry season, I have made more than 10,000 Yuan [= US$ 1,250] from my strawberries." With the strawberries, peasants generate an annual income of 3000 Yuan [= US$ 375] per mu [0.06 hectares] of land, a much higher return than for grain or other crops. The strawberry experiment has been so successful that peasants from neighboring villages have already started emulating Wangdian's strawberry production.

In combination with Wangdian Integrated Rural Development Project's other components, Amity's work has changed the face of Wangdian Township over the course of only a few years. Villagers now have access to basic medical care. Thanks to irrigation, in some areas agricultural production has nearly doubled. Farmers make higher profits and feel less vulnerable to natural disasters than in "pre-irrigation" times. Their children all go to school in well-lit buildings with proper equipment.

Peasants First, Cadres Last
Aside from a dramatic improvement in peasants' living conditions, Wangdian's project has yielded a number of equally impressive, though less tangible, results. To begin with, women are now much more economically active than before, a fact which has significantly increased their self-esteem. "In the beginning, I was so afraid of peddling in the streets," 34-year-old Liang Zhengying remembers. Now, she often carries up to 50 kilos of strawberries to nearby markets for sale.

Amity's involvement in Xuyi County has also helped local cadres develop new skills and insights which will be useful in their future developmental efforts on behalf of the people they serve. Through this project, cadres have learned how to carry out projects by themselves using a participatory approach tailored to the real needs of local farmers. Amity provided training opportunities for the cadres in organic production at the China Organic Food Development Centre. The training supplied officials with the necessary background for assisting villagers with their strawberry production. Soon afterwards, under the guidance and monitoring of the Organic Food Development Center, local strawberry cultivation was entirely switched over to organic production. Cadres were immediately supportive of these moves.

Wangdian Integrated Rural Development Project has also changed the
relationship between peasants and cadres. In recent years, Amity has shifted its emphasis more and more to direct participation of beneficiaries in all areas of project management. Accordingly, part of Amity's training for Wangdian's peasants included a short training course on participatory project appraisal. As a result, the farmers decided to form a strawberry association to make strawberry production and marketing easier and more effective. For local cadres, the idea of an independent association was initially very hard to accept. Now, everybody in Wangdian agrees that the strawberry association enhances both the peasants' organizational capacities and their feeling of common ownership.

"In development work, there is a well-known saying that we should not distribute fish, but rather show the poor how to fish for themselves. Through projects like the one in Wangdian, we have come to realize that it takes even more. We also need to provide more opportunities for people to learn how to sell the fish they catch and even how to raise fish," Qiu Zhonghui comments.

"How did you open up the market for your strawberries?" an Amity board member asks farmer Da Guotai about his marketing strategies. "I gave passers-by samples of strawberries to taste," he grins. In the Chinese countryside, news still travels most effectively by word of mouth.

Facts & Figures:
In cooperation with the local government, Amity supported the following projects in Xuyi County:
- three pumping stations
- a 10 kilometer irrigation ditch
- four village clinics
- improved facilities for two primary schools and one middle school
- 11 primary school libraries
- afforestation of 2500 mu [= 167 hectares approx.] of land with Chinese chestnuts, gingko trees and pines
- an experimental garden for strawberry cultivation

Total amount invested since 1996: 1.4 million RMB Yuan
[= US$ 175,000]

All Aboard For The New Millennium!
Highlights from the Amity Board Meeting

On April 10 of this year, Amity's Board of Directors convened for their annual meeting, which was followed by a two-day trip to one of Amity's integrated rural development projects in Jiangsu Province (See our article The Sweet Taste Of Success in this issue).

Bishop K.H. Ting, President of the Amity Foundation, reflected on the changes Amity's social involvement can bring about for the Chinese church. "What is the use of Amity's work for China's Christians?" a foreign friend had asked him recently. Ting explained in his response: "If Chinese Protestants can accept that social outreach is also a form of Christian involvement, this would be an important contribution Amity can make." Amity could play an important role in shaping a new form of Christianity, Ting said, re-iterating his hope to "see Christianity not only within the church, but also within society and adapted to socialism."

Discussing Amity's future: Board members and staff during the board meeting.
Dr. Wenzao Han, Amity’s General Secretary, outlined some of the tasks lying ahead for Amity in its 17th year of existence. One of Amity’s greatest strengths has been its ability to adapt to newly emerging needs, Han reminded those present. "How can we help people solve their problems? This is a question we must constantly reflect on anew."

The guiding principle for Amity’s involvement is people’s needs - who and where are those most in need? In a response to people’s needs, Amity has been moving westward over the past eight years. In 2000, Amity’s project focus continued to shift west, with an increasing amount of funding going into development work in Guizhou, Yunnan and other western provinces. This shift had been most notable in Amity’s Rural Development Division, which spent 95% of its 2000 budget on work in the western provinces. This trend will be continued, with special emphasis on rural development work in integrated projects, Dr. Han explained.

While China’s western provinces have been struggling with poverty for decades, urban poverty is a relatively new problem in China. Amity has started reaching out to new poverty-stricken groups, like laid-off women workers and migrants, Han reported. (See our article China’s Migrant Workers in this issue.)

Many people regard Amity’s work as charitable work, Han continued. In fact, it is more. It is "social development work" because at the center of Amity’s work are human beings. People are the agents of social development. Only through human development can society as a whole move forward. "This is why we promote a participatory approach at all stages of a project, from feasibility studies, project planning and implementation to evaluation." Moreover, training and education for local beneficiaries plays an important part in all of Amity’s projects. "People are the aim and the agents of social development, and only through people’s involvement can we achieve sustainable development," Han said. "When people see a way to develop themselves, they have hope, and then they have a future."

Han particularly highlighted continued staff training as one of Amity’s challenges. Under the guiding principles of the "Three C’s" - Commitment, Compassion, Competence - Amity continues to promote staff development, Han explained. Sessions conducted by Chinese or foreign experts and study periods abroad are among the methods used for staff development. "Right now, there are three staff members pursuing further studies abroad and one staff member working on a PhD," he said, adding that Amity was very supportive of such initiatives.

When Amity was started 16 years ago, it was virtually the only player in the field of non-governmental de-

velopment work in China. "This has changed. Increased competition constitutes a challenge in promotion and fundraising," Han underlined. At the same time, new opportunities of fundraising emerge, particularly in the more affluent areas of China. Ways of tapping new resources, like addressing local entrepreneurs, must be found, Han remarked.

In order to keep up with its rising number of projects, Amity must strengthen both project management and evaluation, Amity’s General Secretary warned. Strengthening Amity’s organizational capacities must also include avoiding the mismanagement of funds by local partners. As Han explained, not all projects are implemented smoothly. Transparency and effectiveness are easy to demand but difficult to achieve, he acknowledged.

Finally, Han mentioned Amity’s cooperation with related institutions. Over the past year, Amity has continued to increase relations with other organizations like research institutes, organizations at the grassroots and groups working in related fields. In cooperation with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Amity organized China’s first conference on urban poverty and related policies. Similar exchanges enhanced horizontal networking and a spirit of cooperation, Han concluded. •
2000 And Beyond
News from Amity’s Divisions

Rural Development Division (Director: Qiu Zhonghui):
The work of this division is focusing more and more on integrated rural development projects in China’s western provinces. One example of such a project is located in Honghe County, Yunnan Province. In his report to the board, Qiu Zhonghui, head of the Rural Development Division, illustrated how the face of a village can be changed in the course of a single year. Before Amity started to work at village level, living conditions were very hard. At the end of each winter, many families hardly had enough grain left to last until the next harvest. Work opportunities were so limited that villagers would spend their time gambling instead of working in the fields. There was no electricity or running water. Many, especially the women, had never ventured beyond the borders of their township. The village was not just backward in economic terms - deep-rooted customs tended to perpetuate an unhealthy lifestyle. For example, it was uncommon for villagers to grow and eat vegetables. Now, water and electricity lower villagers’ burdens and open the door to new economic activities. Nobody is sitting around idly any longer. Food production has increased - and the villagers’ diet now includes veggies!

Medical and Health Division (Director: Li Enlin):
In her work report at the annual board meeting, division head Li Enlin highlighted Amity’s continuing adaptation to changing needs and circumstances, taking the “barefoot doctors” program as one example. When the program was started, many of the aspiring doctors were middle school graduates right out of school. It turned out that, barely 20 years of age, the freshly graduated village doctors did not inspire much confidence in their patients, nor were they themselves confident enough in their new roles. Accordingly, the "barefoot doctors" program was later reshaped, requiring a minimum of two years work experience from applicants and expanding the training period to one and a half years. Now, the program is facing a new challenge in the form of redrawn regulations on the government’s side. For approval from health authorities, doctors must now have three years of training, a length of time that would make running the program much more difficult. It remains to be seen how Amity will resolve this new challenge.

Church-run projects (Contact: Li Enlin):
Throughout China, church-initiated social service projects are mushrooming, a tendency strongly welcomed by Amity. In 2000, the number of church-run projects supported by Amity increased nearly four-fold to over 100. These include clinics, kindergartens, homes for the elderly and a small number of rural development projects.

Relief and Rehabilitation (Coordinator: Tan Lying):
Amity responded to six disasters during the year 2000, ranging from earthquakes to snowstorms to torrential rains. Through emergency assistance and rehabilitation measures, Amity helped approximately 45,000 people cope with hunger, cold, loss of cattle and more.

Social Welfare Division (Director: Wu An’an):
The Social Welfare Division is home to one of Amity’s oldest and most successful programs, the "Grandma project." Other long-established programs include support for orphanages and the rehabilitation of polio children. As division head Wu An’an explained, the Social Welfare Division will continue to move along these well-established tracks, while at the same time exploring new avenues. One of them is involvement in foster care, a rather new concept in China. In 2000, the first seminar on foster care was organized by Amity and some 216 children were placed in foster families. Wu An’an and her colleagues hope to further develop this child-centered approach in the coming year.
Education Division (Director: Liu Ruhong):
Like Amity’s other divisions, the Education Division is slowly reaching out to China’s underdeveloped west. This year, for the first time ever, Amity will send foreign teachers to Hohhot in Inner Mongolia as part of its summer teaching program. “My students speak better English than I do, but they didn’t learn it in my class,” quotes Liu Ruhong, Director of the Education Division, from a member of an institute which hopes to invite Amity teachers in the summer. The Education Division has now also begun its own “Back to School” program, supporting children from families unable to raise school tuition fees on their own. Finally, Amity is expecting approximately 80 teachers for its regular teaching program which will prepare for another academic year with its annual orientation course for new teachers in Nantong in August.

Blindness Prevention and Special Education Division (Director: Zhuang Ailing):
The work of this division includes not only services for the blind, but also hearing-impaired and physically-handicapped persons. In its work for the blind, one ongoing program is Amity’s participation in the global project “Vision 2020,” a campaign that aims at combating the four major sources of blindness. In the course of these efforts at blindness prevention and treatment, Amity’s local partners performed 10,000 cataract operations in the year 2000. Other programs included vocational training for the blind and community-based rehabilitation projects aimed at the blind, deaf, and physically impaired.

Copies of the Amity Foundation’s 2000 Annual Report can be ordered from:
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Ultragrace Commercial Building 13/F, 5 Jordan Road, Kowloon, HONG KONG SAR

A new field of work for Amity
China’s Migrant Workers
Based on a report by Zhong Xin and Zhang Liwei

Urban poverty is a relatively new phenomenon in China, with the unemployed and migrant workers those most affected. In its efforts to tackle urban poverty, Amity has singled out migrant workers as one target group which will receive special attention in the future.

The whole of China is on the move, or so it seems. One hundred million Chinese, it is estimated, have temporarily migrated from the countryside to the cities. The reasons for this “tidal wave of peasant workers”, as it is called in Chinese, are economic. In the countryside, hidden unemployment is rampant: Too many people work too little land, a ratio that is further deteriorating thanks to increased agricultural productivity. Land is not only scarce, but also less profitable than before, resulting in low incomes from agriculture. At the same time, increased economic opportunities in the cities have created a demand for cheap labor, in particular in the area of construction work. As a result, huge numbers of peasant workers migrate to the cities, where they can sometimes make the equivalent of a year’s rural income within a month. They work on construction sites or in factories, as waitresses or housekeepers. Others are self-employed, collecting garbage or offering services such as bicycle repairs.

As new residents in the cities with only a temporary urban registration card, the migrants comprise a group devoid of rights, recognition and even the most basic of amenities. One of the biggest problems is housing. Construction workers and housekeepers usually live where they work, under conditions much harsher than in the countryside. Married migrants living in factory dormitories face the problem of lack of privacy. Other migrants live in ramshackle buildings on the verge of collapse. Within the cities, migrants from the same areas of China tend to cluster in the same districts, which then usually become known as the “Henan Village,” the “Anhui Village” and so on.

Medical care is another cause of concern for many migrants. Unlike ordinary city residents, migrant workers do not form part of work-related social security systems. In the case of illness, they face huge medical fees which they often simply cannot afford.

While the majority of migrants are young males, many migrants have their families follow them once they have found work and shelter in the city. For these, children’s education is one of the most pressing problems. Local schools are not required to take children from other areas and charge exorbitant fees to migrant children. As a result, migrants have started setting up their own schools, many of which have to operate under dire conditions.
Healthy, affordable entertainment is another problem for migrant workers. Some save every penny to be sent home to their villages, while others turn to gambling for lack of other entertainment.

China’s migrants lack not only proper facilities, but also the skills and knowledge necessary for successful survival in the cities. Many migrants do not speak the national standard language (Putonghua) properly. Dependent upon their employers and overwhelmed by life in the city, migrants are easily subject to arbitrary fees charged by overzealous officials or else legal rights violations by their employers. On the other hand, newcomers to the cities may themselves end up violating city laws out of sheer ignorance of the regulations.

While migration helps to facilitate a flow of money and information from the cities to the countryside, it also creates a number of problems, most notably the dangers of crime (for those migrants who cannot find legal employment) and social tensions between regular city dwellers and temporary migrant residents. Tackling the needs of migrant workers is not only an issue of urban poverty reduction but also of enhancing social stability.

While this dilemma is clearly recognized in China, the government is simply overwhelmed with the number of tasks it is facing in China’s rapidly transforming society. This leaves room for NGOs to step in. The Amity Foundation is currently exploring ways of helping migrant workers to meet their basic needs. Community centers might offer ways of providing migrant workers with primary health care, education in the national standard language Putonghua and opportunities for leisure and social activities. Amity is also seeking to support schools for migrant children. The Amity Newsletter will report on a school for migrant children supported by Amity in its next issue.

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Rebuilding Hope For Education
A Visit To Shijia Village School

Katrin Fiedler

When heavy floods washed away Shijia village school in Ma'er Township (Jiangxi province), local parents saw their hopes for educating their children crumble away with it. Even in normal times, it was hard enough to pay teachers regularly and maintain a proper teaching schedule. But without a school building, how could they hope to continue educating their children?

This was in April 1999. In January 2000, local children were already having classes in their new school, a bright new white building standing out in this area where many houses are red earth-colored buildings made of local mud. What brought about this change?

After the collapse of the old school building, teachers and parents did not give up hope. By setting up makeshift classrooms in different locations, schooling continued at a near normal pace. Still, the idea of building a new school was a distant dream rather than a feasible possibility. Then a visit by Tan Liying, Coordinator of Amity’s Relief and Rehabilitation Division, changed their fate. After her visit to Shijia Village, the Rehabilitation Division decided to assist the construction of a new village school with a sum of 100,000 Yuan [= US$ 12,500]. As this sum covered about one half of the projected expenses, it was just the amount needed to kick-start the construction of a new school. Government bodies at the county and township levels agreed to cover the other half of the expenses and in August 1999, only one month after Amity’s decision to support this project, construction work began.

On approaching Shijia Village School for a final field visit in January 2000, the villagers’ joy and relief concerning their new school are clearly visible and audible as they greet us with firecrackers, a traditional welcome reserved for special guests. It is a cold and rainy day but this has not kept parents and children from waiting patiently for our car to arrive. Holding ornate arches of paper flowers, students form a guard of honor for us. "Welcome, guests from Amity! Thank you, Amity Foundation!" they chant as we enter the school. The whole complex, which was finished only a few weeks earlier, comprises five classrooms, office space, a reading room and even a basic science lab. After a brief tour of the building, our local partners informed us about their work over the last few months.
The new building made quick progress once construction work had started and was completed in less than six months. During the process of construction, Amity’s local partners paid particular attention to "quality and security." As one village representative put it: "We wanted to make sure the materials used for the building were compliant with Amity’s quality standards. So, when we discovered about three wagonloads of poor quality bricks on the construction site, we insisted on their being exchanged." Likewise, security measures on the construction site were strictly enforced, a practice rather uncommon in China. We were told that parents contributed of 20 Yuan [=US$ 2.5] per child for the new school, a considerable sum in an area where the average financial income of a peasant household may be as low as 400 Yuan [=US$ 50] per annum. "Wasn’t this too much of a burden?" we asked. "Oh, no", one mother replied, "we were so happy to give this money when we learned about the funding for the new school."

Shijia village is not the only place where Amity’s Rehabilitation Division is involved in the construction of primary schools. In the past year, numerous villages have benefited from its work. Depending on the economic situation of the project site and the costs for the building, Amity’s assistance will vary between 60,000 and 120,000 Yuan [=US$ 7,500 - 15,000]. How are the costs for a village school calculated?

Generally speaking, one square meter will cost between 320 and 400 Yuan [=US$ 40-50] and, as a rule of thumb, a school needs 2.5 square meters per student. In the case of Shijia Village, which is situated in a poor area, construction costs were rather low at 340 Yuan [= US$ 42.5] per square meter.

For me, the most moving speech that day was made by the school principal, a middle aged man. "When I was a child, I attended Shijia Village School," he said in his address. "I have been with this school for 25 years now, and I am particularly happy that education in Shijia Village can not only be continued but continued in such marvelous facilities."

compiled by Yu Qun

Amity Extends Leprosy Projects

Amity’s leprosy projects have now extended from the southeast coast to central China. In February, Amity started cooperation with the Dermatology Research Institute of Huaihua City, Hunan Province, in carrying out economic rehabilitation projects for 137 leprosy patients in seven counties in Huaihua Prefecture. At the same time, a training program was conducted for 27 social workers who are now working in leprosy prevention and treatment at the grassroots level in Huaihua Prefecture.

Workshop On Rural Project Management Held In Nanjing

In order to regulate and improve the planning, monitoring and evaluation of Amity’s rural development projects, a workshop on project management was held by Amity’s Rural Development Division of the Amity Foundation in Nanjing from April 2-6, 2001. More than 60 local project coordinators and representatives of local partners from 13 provinces, mainly in central and western China, attended the workshop.

Dr. Wenzao Han, General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, and Mr. Detlef Hoffman, representative of EED (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst | Protestant Development Service), one of the biggest overseas partners of Amity, were invited to give opening speeches. The workshop focused on participatory development as a new approach to project management. Theory and practice of project implementation and coordination were also reviewed. Furthermore, participants drew and revised drafts of regulations for project accounting and a participatory project approach.

The Amity Foundation was created at the initiative of Chinese Christian for the purpose of promoting health, education and welfare in the People’s Republic of China. It is an independent Chinese voluntary organization in which people from all walks of life may participate. Amity represents a new form of Chinese Christian involvement in society, through which Chinese Christians are joining hands with friends from around the world to serve the needs of China’s modernization.

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Funding for the work of the Amity Foundation comes from sources, both Chinese and foreign, religious and nonreligious, individual and organizational. Inquiries and suggestions concerning possibilities for new project initiatives are welcomed, as are contributions for the direct support of the Amity Foundation. Checks or bank drafts made payable to the Amity Foundation may be sent to the Nanjing Office.

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The Amity Newsletter is prepared by the staff of the Amity Foundation and printed by the Amity Printing Company, Ltd. Editor: Katrin Fiedler