Urgent Appeal: Fighting SARS In China

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is posing a great threat to the life and health of the Chinese people. The lung disease which first appeared in China's Guangdong Province in November of 2002 has now reached 26 out of China's 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions.

Official statistics reveal that, as of 12th May 2003, a total of 5,013 SARS cases have been identified in China, with 2,476 suspected cases. Of the identified 5,013 SARS patients, 941 are medical workers, 252 have died, while 1,693 have already recovered.

Being the political, economic and cultural centre of the nation, and with the largest floating population in the country, Beijing is the hotbed of the current outbreak, accounting for 2,304 SARS cases alone.

Challenges

A National SARS Control and Prevention Headquarters has been established, and the government has also pledged to release daily updates on the national SARS situation. Central, provincial and lower level authorities have allocated a total of 6 billion RMB (= US$726 million approx.) in the fight against SARS. Yet, in spite of its magnitude, funding is far from enough to fight the disease. And, while SARS challenges health systems and individuals worldwide, the inherent risks in a developing country the size of China are particularly great.

The large number of migrant workers in cities like Beijing carries the risk of "exporting" SARS into their home provinces, regions that typically belong to the poorest parts of the country. Scared at the thought of contracting atypical pneumonia in SARS-infected cities, many migrant workers have already quit their jobs and returned to their hometowns. As they do so, some of them bring the SARS virus back with them.

Clinics and medical staff all over China, but in particular in the country's poorer areas, are unprepared for a health challenge like SARS. There is a severe shortage of respiratory machines and X-ray machines for atypical pneumonia patients as well as protective suits for medical workers who treat them. There is also a lack of disinfectants and thermometers. All this will not only hold up the timely diagnosis of SARS cases, but will also help spread the SARS virus.

The current SARS outbreak thus also highlights the huge gap between medical care in the cities and the vast countryside. According to 2001 statistics, there are an average of 6.28 hospital beds and 4.62 doctors for every 1,000 Beijing citizens while in rural Shanxi Province there are only 3.2 hospital beds and 1.33 doctors for every 1,000 citizens. In many rural counties, there are no specially designated epidemic hospitals or epidemic wards. Measures to prevent the spread of SARS to rural areas require great financial investment and large amounts of disinfectant and medical instruments.
Without such measures, the spread of SARS to the Chinese countryside could result in a major human tragedy.

**Amity’s Response**

Amity and nine other leading Chinese NGOs, such as the China Charity Federation, have made an appeal to all Chinese NGOs to join the efforts of the government, health workers and hospitals to mobilize resources in the battle against SARS. In the face of such a struggle, we ask our worldwide partners to join hands with Amity in fighting this battle. We would like to provide the following:

- 2,000 thermometers X 2.5 RMB = 5,000 RMB
- 150 electronic thermometers X 250 RMB = 50,000 RMB
- 2000 protective suits X 100 RMB = 200,000 RMB
- 2 bedside X-ray machines X 260,000 RMB = 520,000 RMB
- 1 respiratory machine X 220,000 RMB = 220,000 RMB

**Total: 995,000 RMB**

(= US$120,387 approx.)

Apart from financial support to purchase the above items, any direct donations of such items would be highly appreciated as well.

If you would like to contribute to this appeal, please send your donation by cheque, made payable to “The Amity Foundation”, to the following address:

Ms. Shao Pingping  
Relief Work  
The Amity Foundation  
71 Hankou Road  
Nanjing 210008  
P.R. China

For further enquiries, please contact Ms. Shao Pingping at: p_shao@hotmail.com

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**The Smile That Took Ten Years To Grow**

*Xie Ying*

Zhang Gui is a ten-year-old orphan who lives in Zhangjiagang Social Welfare Institute. He suffers from serious Cerebral Palsy, a condition that affects both the physical and psychological development of sufferers. Miao Huiqin, a retired nurse, decided to take him on and became his Amity Grandma. Yet, with all her idealism, it was hard for her to accept what she felt in her first contact with Zhang Gui. The boy made no response at all to any of the signs she gave, his eyes did not meet her eyes, and he did not speak at all. “No matter how impaired the child is, he will definitely make progress as long as I keep helping him with my heart!” Miao Huiqin stayed determined.

Nobody knows how many times Grandma Miao repeated a few simple words to Zhang Gui. In her notes she made about Zhang Gui’s progress, Miao Huiqin wrote with excitement in an entry for the sixth month, “He learned the meaning of the word EAT!”

When Zhang Gui had to be separated from the others because of an eye infection, Grandma Miao stayed with him to keep him company. To dispel any feeling of loneliness, she read short stories to him, and helped with his rehabilitation and medical treatment.

The hard work of Grandma Miao has not been futile. Zhang Gui is now able to walk for three meters at a stretch, and he has started to pronounce sounds.

And, nine months after he became Miao Huiqin’s “grandson”, he smiled the first smile of his life - for her! 

*Xie Ying is an English language graduate who joined the Amity Foundation in November of 2002. She now works in the Social Welfare Division.*
Galloping On In the Year Of the Horse
Highlights from Amity’s 2002 Annual Report

The year 2002 was a stimulating year for Amity as an organization. [...] [Now], experimental projects are being carried out in urban areas to address issues of economic and social justice. There is now work with migrant workers in urban areas involving legal aid and schools for children of migrant workers. There have been projects to retrain laid off women workers. All these indicate that urban poverty issues will be on Amity’s agenda in the coming years.

Opportunities for Amity to work closely with churches in social service projects are growing, especially with the establishment of the CCC/TSPM’s Social Service Department in 2002. This will broaden the base of concern in the Chinese church for mission and social service. [...] A major breakthrough was made in AIDS education by Amity in Henan province, precisely because of the cooperation of local churches. Through partnership with local congregations, Amity has been able to reach out to AIDS victims desperately in need of assistance. In 2002, Amity began a project of AIDS education involving churches in Yunnan and Henan provinces, areas where incidences of HIV/AIDS are high.

 [...] In 2002, Amity continued building its network with other Chinese NGOs and helping to support their growth and expertise through the sharing of experiences. Contributing to the capability building of other Chinese NGOs and churches in development work is an important role that Amity can play in the coming years. At the same time, Amity has much to learn from other NGOs. Mutual learning and support among NGOs will be crucial for expanding the role of civil society. [...]” Dr. Wenzao Han, General Secretary, in his preface to the Annual Report.

New And Ongoing Initiatives

In 2002, the Blindness Prevention and Special Education Division continued with its efforts that are part of "Vision 2020", a WHO campaign aimed at eradicating avoidable forms of blindness until the year 2020. For the incurable blind, community based rehabilitation (CBR) is one way through which Amity tries to help. In 2002, those trained in CBR by Amity in 2001 themselves successfully trained a further 18 new CBR workers in Jiangsu and Sichuan Provinces, thereby embodying the concept of sustainability for this project.

In addition to its mainstay programme, the Teachers Programme, Amity’s Education Division ran three new training centres in Shanxi and Inner Mongolia Provinces in 2001-2002. This new in-service training programme is aimed at improving the language proficiency of middle school teachers of English. Amity teachers, including Amity teacher alumni, also supported orphans of primary school age with subsidies for tuition fees.

In Amity’s Medical and Health Division, new projects taken on in 2002 included a Rural Orphans Foster Care programme for AIDS orphans in Henan Province and HIV prevention workshops for church workers in Henan Province.

In 2002, the Rural Development Division continued with its integrated rural development projects, all of which are centered around the ideas of gender equality, people’s participation and ecological sustainability. Education is one central ingredient of sustainable development, and Project Torch is one new initiative embodying this spirit. In this programme, bright young people from poor rural areas are enabled, through scholarships, to attend institutes of higher education. Many of them volunteer in their local communities or even Amity’s office, thus passing on the torch of help they received.

Most of the Social Welfare Division’s work is aimed at children, including polio victims, orphans, the deaf, and mentally retarded children. A rather new programme for the division, though, caters to adults and children alike. Since 2001, various training and assistance projects have been carried out for leprosy victims and their children.

Church-Related Projects implemented in cooperation with Amity have continuously increased over the past few years. Apart from supporting clinics, welfare projects and retirement homes, Amity also provided assistance for a goat-raising project.
in Shaanxi Province. This project marks a new trend for rural development-oriented projects within the church.

Inevitably, in a country the size of China, disasters will also mark the course of the year. During 2002, Amity offered Relief and Rehabilitation following a number of natural disasters, including hailstorms, hurricanes, and floodings in Hunan, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Guangxi and Inner Mongolia. ◆

Copies of the Amity Foundation’s 2002 Annual Report are available free of charge. Please mail your order to the address below, or send an e-mail to: amityhk@pacific.net.hk

The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong, Ltd. Ultragrace Commercial Building, 13/F 5 Jordan Road, Kowloon HONG KONG SAR, P.R. CHINA

Amity’s Back To School Children - Who Are They?

With nearly 50,000 children now in Amity’s Back To School programme, the ethnic and regional backgrounds of these children vary greatly. However, they all have two things in common: poverty that nearly made them into school dropouts - and the persistent hope for a better life through education.

One of these children is 14-year-old Hu Wenju. He lives in a village 70 km off Zhangjiajie in Hunan Province. Situated high up in the mountains, 10 kilometres from the next road, the village is poor by Chinese standards, with families living in dilapidated, thatched roof cottages.

For Hu Wenju and his family, life was particularly hard because of the leprosy contracted by Hu's father years ago. The disease made him unable to do heavy work, leaving much of the burden of supporting the family to his wife and children.

When the Amity Foundation learned about the Hu's, it was decided that Amity would continue to support schooling for Hu Wenju, and colleagues from Amity’s Social Welfare Division went to see the family to bring them the news. Chu Chaoyu writes about this experience:

"We arrived at Hu Wenju’s home to find him doing homework, his grandfather sitting beside him with a long, sad look on his face. The family welcomed us in, giving us a place to sit and hot tea to drink. We approached Hu’s grandfather with the news that his grandson would be receiving sponsorship from Amity. He then took our hands in his and with deep emotion in his voice said, "I never expected such wonderful news!" The old man explained that since his son Hu Xingzha was infected with leprosy, the whole family had had to endure much, often going without rice to eat because they had been too poor to afford it. Many relatives and neighbours have been hesitant to help due to biases and fears of his ailment. The grandfather said, "It’s been very difficult for the family, especially for my two grandchildren. Even the other children don’t want to play with them. Last year, Hu Wenju’s sister had to leave school, but she often tells me how eager she is to return.” Hu Wenju would have faced the same fate as his sister if it were not for the sponsorship he will receive from Amity.

We ate lunch in Hu Wenju’s home that day. The grandfather took out the pork the family had reserved for such special occasions and it was prepared for that meal. As we ate, Hu Wenju suddenly asked us if there were airplanes in the city we were from. “I like airplanes very much,” he said, “and I hope to be a pilot some day.” ◆
Development Takes Time
Revisiting Wuding, the “Amity Classic”

As one of Amity’s oldest integrated rural development projects, Wuding in Yunnan Province is a good example of this comprehensive model that simultaneously tackles various causes of poverty. At the same time, Amity’s work in the county has been extensively reported on. Still, revisiting long-established projects can provide unexpected insights, as Katrin Fiedler discovered on a recent trip to Wuding in March 2003. Development takes time - and the most impressive benefits of a programme may only be reaped well beyond the typical project duration of three or six years.

In large parts of rural China, harsh ecological conditions hamper agricultural production and the development of a viable infrastructure. Often, the need for sheer survival leads to agricultural practices that bring about further environmental degradation, thus creating a vicious cycle.

Situated to the north of Yunnan’s capital Kunming, Wuding county is no exception. The lack of arable land in combination with the need for firewood has led to the deforestation of mountains. As a result, soil erosion from the denuded mountaintops leads to the deterioration of the fields below, making agricultural production more and more difficult. Heavy rains during the summer months contribute to erosion, while other seasons are characterized by water shortages. To improve conditions for sustainable agricultural production, key elements of the Wuding Integrated Rural Development project are afforestation, slope terracing, and water management through escape ditches, cisterns and water cellars.

The role of human development

All Amity projects include training programmes, be it the teaching of new agricultural techniques or training for local project leaders to provide them with the skills necessary for community development. Such training cannot, however, cover all areas of life, and in many instances, traditional thinking can only slowly be overcome. For example, many Chinese farmers traditionally cook the fodder for their pigs in the belief it will be more nutritious for them. This is not only a time-consuming activity, but also uses up to 50 kilograms of firewood per day. In advocating the use of alternative techniques of fodder preparation, Amity introduces simple silage systems and singles out individuals in the village community who can function as multipliers for new techniques. In this way, Amity tries to ensure a cautious, sensitive approach to the change of traditional ideas. One such agent of multiplication is Yang Juying. With middle school education, several pigs and now even a TV in her home, she is the success story of her village. Now, she is one of the first village women to experiment successfully with silage pig fodder, and she hopes to convince others of the new method.

Amity’s programmes always aim to achieve sustainable forms of development. This poses challenges, as the urgent need for cash crops sometimes entices farmers to plant crops not suited to the natural surroundings. In some cases, the need for cash crops also arises out of lower productivity due to reforestation. In this sense, poverty alleviation measures require particular patience; a concept that may prove beneficial in the long term may have negative side effects in the short term. In Wuding, for example, some farmers have taken to planting tobacco, a plant that needs such an extraordinary amount of “chemical care” that it harms not only the environment, but can also adversely affect the farmers concerned. Coming across such instances, Amity tries
to guide locals in a cautious way in their efforts to balance short term gains with long term development.

Changing government attitude

The Wuding experience is also an example of a change in government attitude. In the beginning, the local government was not overly supportive of the Wuding Integrated Rural Development Project. "It was not easy," affirms Qiu Zhonghui, head of Amity’s Rural Development Division, "because one of the key persons was not very committed." Now, after the project got off to a very successful start (and after a change in personnel), local partners go out of their way to support Amity’s work in the county. Developments like the one in Wuding also highlight the importance of personalities, and the benefits that accompany long-term involvement in a particular area.

The government’s enhanced commitment was demonstrated in a recent press conference dedicated specially to Amity’s work in Wuding. Amity’s local project partners from Wuding co-hosted the press conference in cooperation with Kong Chuizhu, Vice Governor of Yunnan Province. To offer better support and monitoring for the Wuding programme, the government-staffed local project office has recently moved into a new building and taken on additional staff. "It was particularly important for us that the new staff should be a woman, given the fact that important parts of our work are directed specifically at women," explains Ye Xiaoxiang, who coordinates the Wuding programme from the local government’s side. "Unfortunately, women with the right qualifications are difficult to find in places like Wuding."

With several big Amity projects in the province (including an upcoming integrated rural development project with Wa minority villages and an ongoing HIV prevention programme in four counties), the highly supportive attitude of the Yunnan government raises hopes not only for Amity’s work, but also for the province’s poverty alleviation work in general.

Another important element in Wuding is the involvement of local churches. Many of the programme’s target villages are entirely or predominantly Christian. This makes Christian leaders one natural group to address as multipliers for community development. However, this avenue has not been explored systematically so far. Now, Amity is looking at ways of educating church workers on matters relating to community development during lay worker training courses offered by the church.

One community that could benefit from such an approach is Xianma village. 257 out of 308 household here are Christian, explains village leader Yang Shiron. The congregation worships in a relatively new church - a white concrete structure that is by far the best building in the village, where mud-and-straw huts still abound. "The situation has already improved tremendously over the past years. One third of our villagers now live in stone houses, and two-thirds have lifted themselves out of poverty," explains Yang. Amity’s involvement with the village goes back to 1993. Over the past decade, measures have included terracing, electrification, fluoride-reduced stoves, and micro-credits. Xianma has also been selected by the government as a main poverty reduction target, and has been part of a "food for forest" afforestation programme. In this programme, farmers are compensated with food subsidies for the loss in agricultural production caused by reforestation, while measures to increase peasant incomes through other means slowly take hold. Village leader Yang estimates that due to reforestation, the average of arable land per capita has dropped from 1.6 mu to 1.2 mu [0.08 ha approx.]. This means that food security is still a problem for some families.
Development takes time

While irrigation systems or micro credit schemes show their effects soon after their implementation, measures aimed at regenerating the environment take longer to make a genuine impact on agricultural productivity. Years have to pass to undo the negative effects of soil erosion or deforestation. In the light of this, the typical project time frame of three to six years appears short. On the other hand, villagers are often in a position to continue Amity-started initiatives on their own once they get a kick-start.

One successful example of this is Zezu village, a hamlet in Wuding from which Amity withdrew seven years ago. At the time, individual water cellars and a communal cistern were established with Amity's help. "The loving kindness of The Amity Foundation from Nanjing", a touched villager engraved onto the cement cover of his water cellar, his Chinese characters somewhat inaccurate. Listening to him explain the regular maintenance of the water cellar, it becomes clear that this simple installation has become an indispensable part of his work routine. Likewise, the terraces built with Amity's support are in good shape, the spring crop already planted. The long term benefits of the measures taken years ago are only now visible, such as the improvement of arable land through the prevention of erosion. "Before we stabilized the terraces here," a peasant explains, pointing to a field, "the average yield was 150 kilograms of grain per mū. Now, it has gone up to 200 kilos."

Long Yinghua from Zezu village explaining some of the programme's benefits.

Videos On Sale

Aka Manba. The story of an Amity-trained Tibetan monk and doctor.

The Eyes of a Dream. Amity's Blindness Prevention work in action.

Growing up in Hope. Introducing Amity's Back to School Programme.

Our Common Future. Amity and sustainable development in China's countryside.


Videos are around 15 min in length and are available in PAL or NTSC format. Please indicate the format needed. Cost per video: US$10 including international postage. Cheques should be made payable to "The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong, Ltd." Contact us per e-mail, or send your orders to:

The Amity Foundation, Hong Kong, Ltd.
Ultragrace Commercial Building 13/F
5 Jordan Road
Kowloon
HONG KONG SAR, P.R. CHINA
Living In A Silent World

An important part of Amity's work are projects with the hearing-impaired and deaf. Apart from upgrading special education facilities and providing training for teachers of the deaf, Amity also supports rehabilitation and education projects for hearing-impaired children.

These programmes use a bilingual approach, teaching sign language as first and Chinese as second language. Behind this approach lies the philosophy that deaf sign language is a language as valid as any oral or written language and part of a specific deaf culture.

Our story below illustrates this philosophy, giving insight into the worldview of one deaf girl, Sha Mu. She is one of the many deaf and hearing-impaired who benefited from Amity's support in the last year.

Sha Mu Plays With Her Neighbour

Chu Chaoyu

Sha Mu is the daughter of two hearing-impaired parents and she lives in a deaf family. She has several elder brothers who are also deaf. When she began to be interested in the world outside of her home, she noticed a neighbouring girl of the same age. After a few tentative contacts, the two became friends.

The neighbour was a very good playing partner, but there were these strange things about her. Sha Mu was unable to communicate with her in the way she did with her brothers and parents. Even the easiest, simplest signs were obviously alien to her. After a number of futile attempts to communicate, she gave up, using her fingers and objects to indicate what she wanted, and leading her to the places she wanted to go to. Sha Mu really wanted to know how her friend could have such a strange flaw, but after they had found ways of communicating, Sha Mu accepted the special needs of her friend.

Sha Mu clearly remembers the day when she finally realized that her friend was strange indeed. They were playing in the little girl's home, when the little girl's mother came into the room and started to move her mouth. The little girl took her toys and went somewhere else. Sha Mu was confused, and when she came home that day, she asked her mother what kind of problem that little girl had. Her mother explained to her that the little girl was a hearing person, and that these persons do not use sign language. These persons speak, her mother explained, and they can communicate by moving their mouths.

Sha Mu also asked her whether it was only that little girl and her mother who were "like that". Her mother replied that in fact, nearly everybody was like their neighbours, and that it was their family that was unusual. For Sha Mu, this was a moment she would not forget for the rest of her life. She remembered how she had always thought that the neighbour's girl was really strange, and if she was a hearing person, the hearing must really be very strange.

When Sha Mu discovered that the neighbour's girl was hearing, she realized a few things about these "other people". The people living around her and her family have now all become "hearing people". The world is bigger than what she used to think, but her view of herself has not changed at all. She has learned that "those others" live around her, but she has not noticed that those others would have attitudes different from her own. Maybe those others are unusual in her world. From her view of the world, it is those around her who lack communication skills and are special, not the other way round.

Chu Chaoyu from Amity's Social Welfare Division contributed this article as well as our story about Hu Wenju in this issue.