Water Project Floods Village With Bridal Showers

Katrin Fiedler

Supported by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Amity's poverty alleviation project in northern Shanxi focuses on various key elements to fight poverty. Among them are environmental upgrading, access to water and increased cash flow in the area. Starting off with water-related measures in the article below, we will continue our introduction of the project with a look at its microfinance programme in our next edition of ANL.

When Chinese star movie producer Zhang Yimou filmed "Old Well", he settled on a topic that had troubled the lives of Shiyujiao villagers for years. Set in the parched landscape of rural Shanxi, the film describes the struggle between two villages that only have access to one well and literally fight over water. I remember seeing Zhang's epic story about the precious liquid in the early 1990s, impressed with the director's craftsmanship. Leaving the cinema that evening, I would never have thought that villagers in Shiyujiao were still struggling with water issues. While Zhang's story was fictional, the water crisis was very real.

In ordinary years, Zuoquan County, in which Shiyujiao is situated, receives 600 mm of rain. However, droughts do occur, and environmental degradation such as deforestation means that little rainwater is retained in the ground. Shiyujiao and the surrounding area are not unique: large parts of northern China suffer from droughts that are much worse, rendering whole areas uninhabitable. Twenty years on, Zhang Yimou's story of the peasant's watery plight is as timely as ever.

To alleviate the need for water, the central government is now planning a huge water diversion project that will bring river water from China's wet south into the dry north. Zuoquan County, however, does not lie within the reaches of one of the three projected canals and "will not profit from this scheme," says Yu Wen Youyu,
The time that used to be spent carrying water - is it now used for income-generating activities? And so on. In Baibei village (Heshun County), success is measured on a different scale. Here, about 50 kilometres away from neighbouring Zuoquan County, the water problematica had brought about a crisis of a special kind.

"Before our village had its own water supply, girls from outside villages didn't want to marry into our village. They were afraid of droughts," explains Zhang Jinyu, a 43-year old resident of Baibei. "Now, this has changed. In the year following the completion of the water project, we had a real wave of weddings - 12 in total." In a village with 201 households, this is a tide indeed. Zhang continues: "In summer, our drinking water used to be dirty and give people diarrhoea. With the clean drinking water all year round, our health has increased."

Like Shiyujiao, Baibei is subject to droughts. Without direct access to nearby water sources, there was no possibility of irrigating fields, and villagers had to buy drinking water from vendors or carry it into the village themselves. A water pumping station outside of the village now provides the settlement with water, as well as feeding into a newly created irrigation system. Thanks to a new well, villagers enjoy clear drinking water even in the dry season. One woman, who previously could not keep cows because of the continuous struggle for water, now has six cows.

Instead of carrying water, Baibei's villagers can now use part of their time for other income-generating activities. Relieved of the daily task of carrying water, some men now occasionally do odd jobs in the city. Not having to pay the water vendor for his regular supply of water helps households to save money. One peasant estimated that her household's previous expenses for water had amounted to 180 Yuan RMB [US$22.5 approx.] a year, no small feat for local farmers.

But water is only one chain in the link for development in Baibei. A microfinance programme, the planting of cash crops, and an electric mill all contribute greatly to the living standards of the inhabitants. In this northern Chinese village where homemade noodles are part of virtually every meal, the mill in particular makes life much easier. "Thanks to the new mill, we can grind grain and eat whatever noodles we like at any time," beams Zhang Jinyu, sitting in her simple room that serves as bedroom, dining room and kitchen. The woman, whose first name means "goldfish", has also decorated the space above her bed with the lucky yellow species. In eastern Shanxi, wealth and water obviously go together. ♦

Water as one chain in the link

Many water management projects are evaluated mostly by tangible agricultural results. How many fields have been put under irrigation as a result of the project? Did yields increase?
AIDS Epidemic Threatens China:  
Amity’s Response (Part II)  
Zhang Liwei

II. Amity’s responses to the HIV/AIDS epidemic

HIV/AIDS is a tremendous disaster rooted in poverty, which affects all sides of development: political, economic, social and cultural. Women and men, the young and the elderly are all affected in different ways, with women and children being particularly exposed to the virus.

Amity started to give more attention to the HIV/AIDS issue in the early 1990’s. A three-year AIDS Prevention Education Program was started in Yunnan in 1996. Implemented in the three counties of Longquan, Fengqing, and Lincang in Yunnan Province, the aim of the program has been to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS and so 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 through radio, television, films, videos, school blackboards and publicly posted slogans. House-to-house visits are made to ensure that people, both infected and uninstructed, 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 drawn:

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.

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. On the basis of the successful implementation of the three-year AIDS Prevention Education Program, a second three-year program of AIDS Prevention and Care was started in 1999 by Amity, expanding the program to cover four counties in Yunnan Province: Menglian, Lincang, Fengqing and Chengjiang. While prevention education continued to be promoted, new elements of care were added to the program:

1) Boosting the confidence of HIV-positive patients by counseling, 2) Counseling and educating the family members of HIV-positive patients, 3) Providing medical check-ups and advice for HIV-positive patients, 4) Providing free food for the patients and 5) Providing totally free treatment to those poverty-stricken HIV carriers.

III. Amity’s new initiatives

At the beginning of the new century, Amity expanded its HIV/AIDS awareness/education projects to Henan, Guangxi, and Hunan provinces. One particular aspect that merits attention is that Amity has formed a close partnership with the churches in Yunnan and Henan to fight against HIV/AIDS. Courses were held for local church leaders as well as church workers, who became the main trainers for the local communities. The churches then organized further education by any means they could with local resources. For example, after taking the training, members of Xihua Church in Henan province wrote some short plays on HIV/AIDS. The plays were shown when they gathered to celebrate Christmas. Dancheng Church went to the surrounding villages to educate farmers using chalkboards and posters. The Zoukou Gospel Hospital educated patients about HIV/AIDS while they were waiting for service. In Yunnan, churches prepared all kinds of materials on HIV/AIDS for Christians’
reference. Some churches organized home visits to AIDS patients and initiated some income-generating projects to help families affected by the disease.


One new area of work for Amity is the support of AIDS-orphaned children—particularly in Henan province—whose parents died of AIDS after contracting the virus through selling blood to illegal blood snakeheads. Amity provides a yearly grant of 1,500 yuan [US$200, approx.] to cover the tuition, living and medical expenses for the sponsored children.

IV. Conclusion

The prevention of AIDS is a huge social undertaking. It needs participation and concerted efforts at different levels of society. Amity will take the following priority actions to try to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS.

a) Amity will direct its efforts at preventive work by launching massive AIDS awareness education campaigns at the grassroots, especially in the vast rural areas.

b) Amity will work with families, communities and authorities to break the silence and fight against the stigmatization and discrimination of HIV-positive persons and their families.

c) Amity will support initiatives from local churches to start 'Training the Trainers' programs to promote HIV/AIDS awareness education among both Christians and non-Christians.

d) Amity will gear more resources toward the needs of HIV patients and provide care for them if necessary. Special emphasis will be given to the support of AIDS-orphaned children.

Editor's Note: The above article is based on a presentation made at the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland Conference in May 2004. This version constitutes the latest update of a paper published by Zhang Liwei, Deputy General Secretary of the Amity Foundation, on an earlier occasion.

Who Has Moved My Money?

An Interview With Wang Baoling

They are indispensable to Amity's work, and yet, many Amity partners have never met them. Two women accountants share the workload in Amity's central office in Nanjing, one dealing mostly with project-related finances, the other one focusing on internal administration. As project accountant Wang Baoling (55) nears her retirement, ANL spoke with the woman who has seen hundreds of millions of yuan pass through her accounts over the past 14 years.

How did she come to join Amity?

Wang Baoling acquired her accounting skills rather by coincidence: After spending two years in the countryside doing manual work during the Cultural Revolution, her talent for administrative work was discovered and she was upgraded to manage the cash and coupons for her group of young people. Later, she gathered more experience doing accounting work for a construction firm. So how did she come to join Amity? "Han Wenzao, the former Amity general secretary, had known me and my family for a long time. I come from a Christian family, and my mother had worked in the YWCA with him. When I joined Amity, the foundation had already had six accountants in nearly as many years."

What happens typically with a donation arriving in the Amity office?

"Donations are made in three forms: cash - which is very straightforward -, by bank transfer and by cheque. All donations are acknowledged with a thank you letter and an official receipt, which has to meet standards set by the Chinese government. We then in-
form the division heads of the income. In cases of institutional grants, the division heads normally know what money they are expecting. If money arrives without a clear designation, things tend to get more complicated. If no project is specified, the money will go into our revolving fund. For project-related funds, we work closely with the divisions throughout the whole process of project implementation, which typically generates a constant stream of expenses at the grassroots that are reported to Amity and need to be monitored. One problem is to ensure proper accounting procedures from our project partners at the grassroots. Every month I have to go through stacks of project-related expenses.”

How does Amity meet its administrative costs?
“Currently, only one major donor organization contributes to our core budget (EED), while other organizations support Amity’s administrative expenses through our 7% administrative overhead. Applications for institutional funding, whether project-related or for administrative purposes, always have to follow the procedures required by the organizations concerned. By the way, the 7% rule follows a formula that differentiates between project costs and administrative costs. We levy the 7% administrative fee on the project costs [but different kinds of projects generate different types of cost]. Sometimes we lose, sometimes we win,” she laughs.

Her biggest headache: having to send money back out of the country

What legal requirements set the framework for her tasks?
“Once a year, our accounts will be audited by a public accounting firm. As a non-profit organization, Amity does not pay taxes apart from the employees’ personal income taxes. But there are legal aspects to my work that make my life difficult. The biggest headache is the limited convertibility of the Yuan RMB. This means that foreign exchange can be imported into China, but not exported. There is a 2,000 US$ ceiling on foreign exchange exports, and if you want to change Chinese yuan into foreign currency, you have to have reasons such as imminent studies abroad. Besides, you have to go through a complicated system of applications with different institutions. Therefore, what I fear most is money that comes in mistakenly and has to be sent back out of the country.”

“You cannot have money sitting around - people need our help now”

A personal outlook...
After 20 years as an accountant, 14 of which she spent at Amity, Wang remains modest to the point of being apologetic about the role of her work. “I find it difficult to make a real contribution - the only expertise I can offer is in my own area of work. The thing I regret most is my lack of foreign language skills, which means that I can only work in a very limited area.” “But at least,” she adds later, “I can guarantee that the money is used safely.”

For her personally, she regrets not having had any opportunity to travel to some of those countries whose guests and funds she has helped receive over the past years. “And for us accountants, it is even harder than for the rest of the staff to take time off. You cannot have money sitting around. I spent eight years in the countryside myself. The people at the grassroots - they need our help, and they need it now.” Finally, the moment has come for Wang to make up for some of the past shortcomings.

“My work requires concentration and a good memory. You have to be very fit. Therefore, I think it is good to retire. Let the young generation have a go!” she laughs.
AMITY EASTER TOUR

Theresa Carino

Sichuan is well known globally for its spicy, tongue-numbing cuisine. Surrounded by high mountain peaks and beautiful valleys, it is also the home of the giant panda and the site of some of China’s most ancient archeological finds. Participants in Amity’s Easter Tour discovered all of these and more in a two-week study tour to the province in April 2004. Composed of church representatives, interns, pastors, mission co-workers and a former Amity teacher, they came from Australia, Canada, Germany, India, Indonesia, Philippines, UK and the USA.

The tour began with a visit to Shanghai, where the group received a warm welcome and briefing from Presbyter Ji Jianhong and Rev. Cao Shengjie at the headquarters of the CCC/TSPM. We were informed that young pastors and church workers are undergoing intensive training in English language skills to enable more overseas exchanges and participation in ecumenical activities. Congregations are being encouraged to integrate their faith with social service. A discussion ensued about theological reconstruction, the relationship between gospel and culture, the role of women and youth in the church and the possibilities of more exchanges between Chinese churches and those in other Asian countries. We were told that seminary faculty are being encouraged to undertake research in an effort to raise standards in theological education. At Huadong (East China) Seminary, in the outskirts of Shanghai, the group was received by the seminary president, Rev. Su Deci who provided further details about seminary education in China. The four-year program of the seminary covers subjects such as systematic theology, hermeneutics, pastoral theology, Christian ethics, as well as Chinese history and Western philosophy. For their field work, students are assigned to meeting points and house churches three times per semester, an indication of how seminaries are trying to cope with rapid church growth in the urban areas.

Leaving the futuristic skyline of Shanghai behind, the group flew to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan. Chengdu exudes a charming blend of old and new. A visit to the Wuhou Ancestral Shrine, which dates back to the time of the Three Kingdoms (around 809 AD), breathed life into the legends of ancient heroes such as Zhu Geliang and Yue Fei. Most impressive was the visit to the archeological site and museum at Sanxingdui, 50 kilometers to the north of Chengdu. Excavations since the 1930s have revealed large quantities of cultural relics including bronze and gold vessels, stone and jade ritual utensils, pottery, ornaments and human figurines dating back to more than 3,000 years. Fascinating and mystifying were the gold-plated masks that were reminiscent of the civilization of the Incas. These artifacts underscored the long history of religion in Sichuan.

In an informal briefing, the Section Chief of Sichuan’s Religious Affairs Bureau stressed the multi-religious character of Sichuan where Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Daoism, Islam and Christianity co-exist and seem to have thrived. There are 8 million believers in Sichuan (out of a total population of 80 million) among whom there are an estimated 250,000 Christians. Most of the pastors for the province’s 140 churches have been trained at Sichuan seminary since 1984. As elsewhere in China, the training and ordination of pastors has not kept pace with explosive church growth. In Chengdu, the church served by Rev. Yuan Shiguo who also teaches at the seminary, grew from a membership of 40 to 7,000 in the last 6 years. On Sunday, we joined worshippers at the newly built Guangan Church, in the outskirts of Chengdu, which has seats for more than 1,000.

Integrating faith with social action is not uncommon these days among Sichuan’s Christians. According to Rev. Wei Kang, Chairman of the Sichuan Three Self Patriotic Movement, the past few years have seen local churches supporting kindergartens, scholarships for children from poor families, homes for the elderly, clinics and health centers. In Luzhou City, located in a remote corner southeast of Chengdu, the energetic Pastor Liao Xiaqiun personifies the potent combination of evangelistic fervor and deep social concern. Under her leadership, the Luzhou Church has focused on lay training for the last few years, producing 120 lay workers and evangelists each year. These in turn become trainers who run courses twice a year for churches and meeting points. A four storey training centre is being constructed to cope with the demands for lay training and social services. The youthful Pastor Liao, whose husband tragically died a few years ago for lack of medical attention and facilities in Luzhou, has been the driving force in the setting up of a health center which she hopes to expand into a hospital in the near future. She believes people in Luzhou deserve better health services at lower costs and is determined
to make the hospital a reality.

The crying need for better health care, education and infrastructure was evident as the group travelled four hours further into remote and poor areas such as Hejiang and Fubao counties. The poverty in the countryside was a dramatic contrast to the wealth and glamour of Shanghai. As we trekked along narrow footpaths for 45 minutes, skirting rice fields to reach the home of one of the clients of Amity's Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Project, we seemed to enter a different world. Cars were replaced by donkeys, skyscrapers by windowless homes of brick and clay.

Since 1997, Amity has pioneered in CBR work whose impact on local communities has been significant. In Hejiang alone, 32,000 have physical disabilities and 1,000 are blind out of a population of 870,000. Amity's project has benefited 991 blind people. According to the Director of the Luzhou Federation for the Disabled, the most important change has been in people's attitudes towards those who are visually impaired. Earlier dismissed as a burden to society, the recipients of CBR training now take pride in being self-reliant and have earned the respect of their relatives and neighbours. In fact, in Hejiang County, 38 year-old Mr. Shi Guangming (whose name means "To give light") has become a celebrity of sorts. Not only has he been "lifted out of poverty", he is the proud owner of a massage clinic and one of the most eligible bachelors in town.

Running a two-storey massage clinic that caters to as many as 50 clients a day is all part of a day's work for Shi Guangming. Looking very trendy in shades and stylish t-shirt, his services are in great demand judging by the frequency with which his cellphone rings. The son of a poor farmer, Shi Guangming lost his sight in an accident when he was twenty. He was one of Amity's first clients in 1997, when the CBR project began in Hejiang county. He was trained in mobility skills and given a chance to study Braille, which he said helped him "broaden his views". After learning Chinese massage techniques from a traditional expert, he decided to start his own business with a bank loan and start-up funds from Amity. Since then, he has trained more than 50 people, some of whom have physical disabilities. Having benefited from Amity's training project, he wants to "repay" what he has gained and pass on the benefits to others. His clinic not only provides work for the disabled, he also waives fees for the poor who come to him for massage therapy.

After visiting different clients of the CBR project in Hejiang and Fubao, tour participants returned to Luzhou to meet two Amity teachers who have been placed at the Luzhou Vocational Institute. Having arrived from Hejiang and Fubao counties, we were now more able to understand the importance of the placements. Many of the students at the Institute come from these and other similarly poor counties. Helping to raise the standards of English teaching at the Institute would mean much for the future of its students. It would provide better access to advanced science and technology, enable students to pursue further studies overseas or simply help to close the east-west cultural gap. Teaching English in this context was not just transmitting a language skill—it was development work.

As we prepared to leave Sichuan, we realized what a privilege it had been to visit the countryside and given glimpses into the lives of so many individuals. Their spiritual strength, commitment and tireless efforts to improve community life at the grassroots was a deep well from which we had drunk. We left, refreshed and inspired. ♦

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Fresh off the press! Amity 2005 Calendar

The 2005 Amity Calendar is a collection of artwork by fisherfolk who participated in the First China Zhoushan Fishermen's Paintings Art Festival. These young artists, many of whom had never taken up a paintbrush before, come from families that have lived by the sea for generations and are used to the roar of breaking waves and violent winds. Their lives and their survival depend on the sea, which they regard with great ambivalence. Their paintings, however, are pure beauty. Secure your copy now! For orders larger than ten copies, please contact the Nanjing headquarters. Orders up to ten copies should be placed with the Hong Kong office:

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An "Eye-Opener": South-South Exchange with the Philippines

To strengthen organizational structures and promote the management skills of Amity staff, eleven staff members participated in a ten-day management training in the Filipino city of Tagaytay in spring of this year. Organized in cooperation with a long-time Amity partner, the Philippine-China Development Resource Center (PDRC), the meeting comprised both theoretical and practical elements. Below, Zhu Yanwei from Amity's Publicity and Promotion Desk, Zhou Bo and Xie Ying from the Social Welfare Division share some of their impressions.

For most of the staff, the visit to the Philippines was a first. Zhu Yanwei remembers: "In comparison with China's west, I found the farmers to be better off. The environment is less degraded and, relatively speaking, less densely populated. I also had the impression that the educational level of the fishermen was better [than that of the farmers in China's west]. In the Philippines, you have a weak government, which is one of the reasons for the strong NGO movement. In China, it is the other way round."

Project management skills taught in the programme included problem analysis, goal-oriented planning, project evaluation and more. "The training was organized especially for us, and as we followed their systematic explanations, we could bring in questions regarding Amity's project management," says Zhu Yanwei appreciatively. "For me, working in the Rural Development Division, the methods introduced were very similar to what we are already doing in our division."

Xie Ying: "In the Social Welfare Division, we work on an individual case basis, which is quite different. For me, the project management training was an eye-opener. For example, because we work with a number of long established partners, we just submit our project proposals when the time comes. Now, we know how such things work when we have to do them." Her colleague Zhou Bo explains: "We get an idea of other ways to manage projects. Dealing with social welfare, we are used to approaching projects the other way round - from an individual-case basis. Now, we see the bigger picture - the general concepts behind this."

The programme also included visits to Filipino NGOs such as Chosen Children, Center for Ecological Learning and Living, and Upland Cavite Habitat for Humanity. Zhou Bo: "I found that the NGOs we visited were very professional."

"The organizations we saw were smaller and more focused in their aims than Amity. For example, they specialize on children in their neighbourhood, or they exclusively build houses, or their mission is to work for the livelihood and preservation of the local fishermen," Xie Ying adds.

The lively instruction methods employed during the training greatly enhanced student's initiative, and the whole training contributed to create a team spirit within the group. "And, Xie Ying notes, "It was a real pleasure to work with the PDRC staff."*