

6 | A Sociological Research on Poverty in China¹

6.1 The general characteristics

6.1.1 Ethnic characteristics of poor people

309 China is a big country with a rich diversity of cultures consisting of 56 ethnic minorities. This diversity is often hidden because 90% of China's population belongs to the Han nationality, and only 10% to all other minority peoples in the citizenry. Due to historical reasons, most of the minority people live on the frontiers with scarce natural resources. Undoubtedly, they usually live in poverty.

Table 6.1: The occurrence rate of poverty in the areas where minorities are highly represented in the population (1996)

Provinces	Number of Poor People in the rural areas (<i>million</i>)	Occurrence rate of poverty
The whole nation	919.4	6.3
Guizhou	29.8	12.8
Yunnan	33.5	22.9
Xizang	2.1	10.1
Guangxi	39.0	6.4
Neimenggu	14.2	9.3
Shanxi	27.5	17.5
Gansu	19.7	22.7
Qinghai	3.3	17.7
Ningxia	3.7	18.5
Xinjiang	8.8	27.4

Sources: The World Bank, 2001, *China conquers rural poverty*, China financial & economic publishing, p26

310 It is obvious that, at present, poverty is concentrated in provinces where representation of ethnic minorities is well above the national average. China's State Commission of Ethnic Affairs data shows that in the mid-1990s, three-fourth of poor counties in autonomous minority areas had a per capita annual income below ¥400, and four-fifth of counties in autonomous minority areas had a per capita annual income below ¥300 (The World Bank, 2001, p31). According to a poverty monitoring report prepared by the Rural Social and Economic Investigation Group (RSEIG), State Statistical Bureau of China, the average income level per capita of the farmers in the minority areas are much lower than that of the old liberation areas assisted by the government, though higher than that of the frontiers (SSB, 2000).

¹ This report was written originally in Chinese by the author, then it was translated into English by Dr. Xiong Yuegen (a lecturer also from Department of Sociology, Peking University) upon the request of the author. Needless to say, all the errors in the report of English version remain to the translator.

Table 6.2 per capita annual income of the farmers in ethnic minority areas compared with other areas (¥/person)

Areas	1997	1998	1999
The whole country	2090.0	2162.0	2210.0
The old liberation areas	1303.8	1393.2	1420.1
The frontiers	1034.8	1072.5	1108.7
The ethnic minority areas	1137.7	1192.0	1234.9

Sources: Rural Social and Economic Investigation Group, SSB, 2000, *A rural poverty monitoring report in China*, p12

311 Moreover, the minority regions are poorer compared to other areas in the same province. For example, the per capita annual income of poor counties in Sichuan Province was ¥1,032 in 1997, and meanwhile the same indicator of three poorest counties that are minority areas was only ¥720--¥860. In Simao County, Yunnan Province, the minority people occupied 61% of the total population of the county, but it shared 90% of the total absolute poor population (The World Bank, 2001:31). In Guangxi Autonomous Minority Region, all the 12 autonomous minority counties are poor areas, which shared 70% of minority population of the region.

312 Since the initiation of " 8-7 Poverty Alleviation Plan ", the government at each level had paid great attention to tackle down the poverty in the minority areas with a high priority in policy implementation. However, owing to historical and natural reasons, the minority people have been strongly burdened with poverty.

6.1.2 The livelihood structure of poor groups

313 In May 2001, China publicized the number of poor people in the country--- there were totally 30 million poor people living under an income level of ¥625 which was used as a poverty line. But so far, the government has not given the overall data about the poor. According to the monitoring report of RSEIG, in 1999, the average annual pure income per capita in the nationally designated poor counties was very low. The average annual expenditure of each peasant was spent on family business and living expenditure. In the living expenditure, developmental expenditure was very scant.

Table 6.3 Sources and structure of annual pure income per capita in the nationally designated poor counties (1999)

sources of income	Amount (¥)	Proportion (%)
wages	339.0	25.1
family business	964.0	71.6
Transferring income	28.0	2.1
Property	17.0	1.2
Annual pure income per capita	1348.0	100.0

Sources: SSB, 2000, p17

Table 6.4: Expenditure and structure by each peasant in the nationally designated poor counties (1999)

Distribution	Amount (¥)	Proportion (%)
Food	625	60
Clothing	63	6
Habitation	119	11
Household equipment	43	4
Health	44	4
Transport and communication	27	3
Education and recreation	104	10
Other commodities and services	19	2
Gross expenses	1044	100

Sources: SSB, 2000, p18

314 According to Engel's coefficient, the farmers in these areas live in an absolute poverty and the livelihood of those in the nationally designated poor counties was even worse.

6.1.3 The socio-economic characteristics of poor groups

(1) Bigger Households but Less Labour Power

315 Official data shows that poor households in China are significantly bigger than non-poor households but, because of a higher dependency rate within poor households (ie., the number of children, elderly, and infirmed or injured as a proportion of family size), they have less labour power able to participate actively in wage or household production.

Table 6.5 Family structure and population quality in the poor households compared with the non-poor households

Indexes	The poor households	The non-poor households
proportion of family size at least five family members (%)	69.9	36.5
Burden coefficient of labour power	1.64	1.5
Illiterate rate of labour power (%)	22.1	8.9
Enrollment rate of children during age 12-14 (%)	88.7	96.6
Short rate of labour power(%)	14.1	2.5

Sources: SSB, 2000, p18

316 There is also a significant difference between poor and non-poor households in quality and quantity of housing. In poor households crowding is a problem, with room space for each family member limited 14.1 square meters in poor households compared to 24.2 square meters in non-poor peasant households. Based on a survey conducted by the National Ethnic Commission (NEC) in 2001, 50.9% of peasant families were found to live in homes constructed of mud or bamboo. From our investigation, an absolute number of poor peasant families lived in mud-stone or grass-made houses, and some peasants' houses have neither windows nor doors. Quality of housing is often a very effective poverty targeting criterion when one wants to identify the poorest houses in a poor village.

Box 6.1 Zhang's family in Sandaogou Village, Xiaobazi Town, Fengning County

There are five people in Zhang's family: Zhang, his mother, wife and two children (15-year-old daughter and 8-year-old son). A couple of years ago, the flooding destroyed Zhang's self-constructed mud-brick cottage. Now, they are living in the Zhang's second old brother's cottage in the town of the county, which was also made of mud-brick and neither walls nor yards could be seen. The doors of the house were made to be half-size. In the house, furniture was scant.

(2) Health Problems Critical to Chronic Poverty

317 In the course of CPAP field tests in Fengning County, Hebei Province, it was found that the health status of critical family members is critical to the ability of rural households to escape poverty. Among poor households investigated, the general health of farmers was found to be very bad, with 20-50% of adult women confined and unable to work for at least 3 months due to serious illness. Coming to understand the sources of these illnesses will be important to ensuring the quality of the human resources available to poor households is upgraded to levels where household self-reliance is a realistic achievable outcome.

318 Hard core poverty in China is also associated with the burdens of human disability. In the "8-7 Poverty Alleviation Plan", the government took specific measures to help disabled people in rural areas, including provision of loan funds for rehabilitation and poverty alleviation activities suitable to the disabled. These initiatives have resulted in improvements in the livelihood of disabled people, but poverty of the disabled remains a concern for national public policy. During the "Ninth-Five-Year Plan", 13.72 million disabled people received assistance from the government and 8.29 million are now judged as having sustainable access to adequate food, clothing and other basic needs. However, at the end of 2000, there were still 6.87 million of disabled people awaiting assistance due to backtracking to poverty etc. (China Disabled Persons Federation, 2001:12-15). In the poorest rural areas, disabled people remain the most vulnerable group who can hardly dependent on social relief. Consider, for example, in Jiangsu Province, one of China's more developed areas, more than 60% of the poor are disabled people (The World Bank, 2001).

(3) Gender and poverty

319 It is very important to consider the relationship between gender and poverty. However, the systematic data of such a relationship have not been sufficiently collected because the country statistics of China state is based on the unit of family. There is a vexing problem of feminization of poverty in the poor rural areas. For example, women are easily deprived of the opportunity of education, the loss rate of girls' schooling is higher than that of the boys'. In Shanxi province, the loss rate of schooling of the rural girls was 70% and the illiterate rate of adult women was almost 70% (Zhao Junchen,

1997: 428). Based on a survey on the rural women's health status and nutrition in 13 autonomous minority regions, 75% of women had been malnourished. In Lancang County, 95% of the rural women of Lagu Minority have been suffered in anemia (Zhao Junchen, 1997: 443).

6.2 Causes of poverty

6.2.1 Employment structure and poverty

320 In rural China, family business and labor become two major sources of household income. The statistical data indicated the evident difference of employment structure and economic status between the poor households and the non-poor households.

Table 6.6 Employment structure and income structure in the poor households compared with the non-poor households (1998)

Indexes	the poor households (%)	the non-poor households (%)
Proportion of family business income	86.4	76.3
Among them: proportion of agriculture income	79.0	65.0
Among them: proportion of planting income	58.4	45.0
Proportion of non-family business income	9.3	14.9

Sources: Rural Social and Economic Investigation Group, SSB, 2000, *A rural poverty monitoring report in China*

321 For those poor peasant households, there was a higher percentage of family business income and a lower percentage of non-family business income (SSB, 2000). In 1998, 84.1% of poor rural labor forces relied on traditional agriculture and only 12.5% of the labor force went outside to work as wage-earners (Xu Feiqiong, 2000). Country Poverty Monitoring Center of China data indicated that, in 1998, 92.6% of rural households engage in agriculture among the 255 nationally designated poor counties in autonomous minority areas. The rural households relying on traditional agriculture were more likely to be poor owing to the low production and fluctuating price of crops.

322 According to the findings of the pilot study conducted by the Research Group of this project in Fengning County, there were various kinds of employment for different types of households in the poor rural areas. The poorest households with elderly or chronically-ill family members could solely rely on farming. The poorer households with male adults usually could have extra energies to manage sideline production or work outside. The well-off households with sufficient labors could successfully manage their farming and sideline production as well. There was a high proportion of the male adult who has worked outside. Some of the households even could manage their own business.

Therefore, the amount of labor wage and business income will definitely influence whether they are in poverty.

6.2.2 Level of education and the difference between the rich and the poor

323 In the poor rural areas, the heat of working in the urban areas insofar had weakened the relationship between education and poverty alleviation. However, the relationship between the household income of farmers and their educational level still exists.

Table 6.7 peasants' educational level and annual household income per capita

peasants' educational level	total	Below ¥640	¥641--¥1000	¥1000--¥2000	Above ¥2000
Illiteracy and semi-illiteracy	100.0	21.3	29.8	38.4	10.5
Junior elementary school	100.0	15.0	25.3	44.4	15.4
Senior elementary school	100.0	12.5	22.2	47.4	17.9
Junior high school	100.0	10.5	19.8	48.7	20.9
Senior high school	100.0	10.6	19.0	47.7	22.8
Technical secondary school	100.0	7.2	14.2	46.7	31.9
Junior college and above	100.0	7.9	9.5	53.9	28.6

Sources: Rural Social and Economic Investigation Group, SSB, 2000, *A rural poverty monitoring report in China*

324 According to the monitoring report, there is a very obvious correlation among educational level of the farmers, their average annual household income and occurrence rate of poverty (The criterion line of poverty was ¥640 in 1999). In addition, the motivation of farmers' participating scientific training programs proved to be quite modest, baffling farmers' poverty alleviation. The result of sample survey conducted by the Rural Social and Economic Investigation showed that the proportion of rural labor forces' participating training programs decreased from 15.52% of 1997 to 9.32% of 1999.

6.2.3 The poor health status of the farmers

325 The nutrition standard among poor farmers is very low and the problem of malnutrition is extensively witnessed. The nutrition standard of some low-income households in rural China was only 1898 Calorie which was below the standard of 2150 Calorie set by the World Bank (Gao Yuxi, 1996). One nutrition monitoring report of 16,000 children below age six in the poor rural areas indicated that the rate of malnutrition varied from 16.4% to 60.0% (Chang Ying, 1994). Owing to the negative

impact of adverse natural environment, many people in poor rural areas suffered endemic diseases. Moreover, the shortage of healthy facilities and services under circumstance of underdeveloped economy made farmers' health status even worse. In 1998, 29.0% of the poor villages in China did not have a single clinic. 37.5% of China's poor rural households had no safe potable water (SSB, 2000:9). Another survey conducted in Shangxi Province in 1999, which covered 50 poor counties and 313 villages, indicated only 23% of the villages had clinics, and 38% of farmers had to walk 2-5 kilometres to see a doctor (SSB, 2000:21). Having difficulties in traffic, many farmers who suffered illness never went to see a doctor that reduced their working abilities.

Box 6.2 The poor farmers with illness did not see a doctor

Most of the poor farmers in Fengning County, particularly the women suffered one sort of bone diseases which was caused by adverse natural environment and insufficient health services. Obviously, the patients suffered this bone disease could not deal with heavy work. Their usual coping strategy against the pain caused by the disease was mainly to swallow Aspirin pills. Every family with the patients usually prepare themselves Aspirins for a sole purpose of reducing the pain. Consequently, lots of farmers suffered gastric disease, having poor working abilities. Thus forming a vicious circle of poverty.

6.2.4 Isolated geographic condition and closed communities

326 The relatively isolated and adverse geographic condition made the poor farmers difficult to access to exchanges of commodities and to obtain technology information. Moreover, the lack of electricity, road and television signals made the situation of poverty in the rural areas worse.

Table 6.8 The traffic condition of poor villages in the nationally designated poor counties

Indexes	unit	1997	1998	1999
Distance to the nearest bus stop	%	100	100	100
Below 2 kilometres	%	31.59	29.36	28.86
2-5 kilometres	%	23.90	23.94	24.01
5-10 kilometres	%	12.74	13.37	13.77
10-20 kilometres	%	10.81	14.25	15.15
Above 20 kilometres	%	20.96	19.08	18.21
Primary traffic tools	%	100	100	100
walking	%	18.12	16.83	15.35
bicycles	%	34.32	32.54	31.25
buses	%	34.53	36.91	39.14
Other machines	%	9.88	10.42	11.58
other	%	3.15	3.30	2.67

Sources: Rural Social and Economic Investigation Group, SSB, 2000, *A rural poverty monitoring report in China*

327 SSB(1998) data shows that 51.1% of China' poor people live in mountainous areas compared to 24.8% of non-poor people, 33.8% of China' poor people are short of nature resources compared to 7.3% of non-poor people (SSB, 2000: 9).

328 One consequence of economic development has been a shift in the geographic concentration of rural poverty. In 2001, the 18 contiguous poor areas designated by the government are all remote areas with tough natural conditions. In the early 1990s, 50% of poor people in rural China came from the west. By the close of 1996 this figure had increased to 70%! It remains true, moreover, that within poor counties, it is the households that are most isolated that are also the poorest. Shen (2001) has reported that in Jingping County, Yunnan Province, more than 60% of 8000 Kuchong minority people live in the mountainous areas and remote places. Farmers have a 7-8 hour walk to reach the nearest highway. Their situation is not uncommon in most poor counties.

6.2.5 Social factors attributed to poverty

329 Most scholars argue that temporary practice become the main cause of poverty in the developed countries and historical factors are the major source of the poverty in the developing countries (Xu Feiqiong, 2000). But, one can hardly deny that social institutions have created a big impact on the cause of poverty when considering the reproduction of intergenerational poverty. The course of the poorest rural households walking out of poverty are delayed by China's administrative system (policy) of poverty alleviation. This can be attributed to a series of factors as follows: The magisterial policy of anti-poverty make poor people have less enthusiasm to participate. There is shortage of clear objectives in using the funds of poverty alleviation. Poor rural households have less chance of obtain essential loan funds owing to the rural credit system. The effect of poverty alleviation can not be consolidated because the system of poverty alleviation is in pursuit of a short-term achievement, thus bringing mass farmers to backtrack into the poor situation. (China's backtracking poverty rate is well above 20%, and even more than 40% in some provinces), The objectives of local governments' poverty alleviation are in conflict, causing funds to leak and objectives to depart in the process of using the funds of poverty alleviation (Wu Guobao, 2001:33-35). This system baffles the process of poverty alleviation to continue effectively. It will be more effective for the exploration on poverty alleviation if the factors of institutional arrangement and citizen participation have been considered in the planning of poverty reduction.

6.3 Participatory poverty evaluation on the vulnerable groups

6.3.1 The implications of participatory poverty evaluation

330 In order to maximize the benefit level, it is essential for the poor people to understand poverty itself and to participate in the process of poverty alleviation. The theoretical foundation of participatory poverty alleviation lies in the subjectivity of the poor people, including their knowledge about poverty as well as their action get involved in poverty alleviation. One failure or shortcoming of the past experience of poverty alleviation in rural China was the exclusion of the poor people and the policy-makers neglected the meaning of their participation in the anti-poverty process. For instance,

the unequal treatment of approving the farmers' loan application between the rich and the poor, the exclusion of selection of poor farmers' programs in poverty alleviation. The policy of poverty alleviation usually encourages the poor farmers to make full use of the loan policy. However, the poor rural household can rarely get the loan from the bank in practice. The situation of poor farmers becomes further marginalized under the condition of certain local officials' ignorance of farmers' participation. Two typical examples of the successful measures are micro credit and serial poverty alleviation, which emphasize a lot on the farmers themselves and their participation. The farmers' participation will make the cause of poverty alleviation more meaningful, meanwhile a fundamental condition for the process of a sustainable development will be guaranteed. But, one point that the researcher may emphasize again is: such a participation should never be superficial and fragmented, but should be comprehensive and in-depth. Thus, the participation-oriented poverty alleviation policy will be a challenge to the centralized administration of rural formal power structure that ignores the participation of the vulnerable groups in rural China. The research team of the project had explored an experimental measure in Fengning County, Hebei Province, Dahua County, Guangxi Zhuang Minority Autonomous Region, and Jingning County, Gansu Province, in order to seek the new approaches of poverty alleviation and planning. In the course of the above experimental projects, the researchers organized various vulnerable groups to participate in the process of participatory poverty evaluation.

6.3.2 The indicators of poor farmers' participation in poverty alleviation

331 During the period of exploring new planning approaches of poverty alleviation, the project team conducted a series of participatory evaluation in eleven poor villages in Tuchengzhen town, Xiaobazi town, Kulongshan town, Fengning County, Hebei Province; in Qibainong town, Dahua County, Guangxi Autonomous Region and in Chengchuan town, Jingning County, Gansu Province respectively. In the course of evaluation, the representatives of poorest rural households, women representatives, village cadres, primary school teachers and some socially prominent persons were included. At the phase of poverty identification, the project team invited the cadres of poor villages and women representatives to express their opinions on construction of the poverty indicators proposed by the experts. More important, these peasant representatives could have a final say on the poverty indicators. In other words, the poor farmers themselves would decide which kind of poverty indicators is more appropriate for an evaluation of poverty alleviation. In practice, the project team gave the priority of expressing opinions to the poor peasant and women representatives. The poverty indicators would only be determined until the discussion and feedbacks of the farmers had been fully considered. The poverty indicators provided by the project team include average annual yields of grain per capita, average annual cash income per capita, proportion of thatched cottage peasant households, water sanitation, accessibility to reliable electricity, availability of all weather roads, rate of chronically-ill women and the dropping-out rate of girls' schooling. In Fengning County, the project team adopted the opinions of the farmers and replaced the indicator "proportion of thatched cottage households" as "mud-brick and stone

cottage households ”, because there was no thatched cottage in the regions of North China where the mud-brick and stone cottage was regarded as the worst housing condition. Moreover, “ the dropping-out rate of girls’ schooling ” was also changed to “ loss rate of pupils and middle school students ” due to the situation of a higher proportion of boys’ discontinuous schooling in some rural areas. One striking phenomena that impressed the evaluators mostly was the unanimous opinion of the farmers on the cause of poverty. The poor farmers, women representatives and the village cadres had very consistent expressions on the characteristics of the poor households and the cause of their poverty in the rural areas. The farmers’ participation in the process of poverty evaluation had been proved to be highly valuable for the understanding of poverty as well as seeking the solutions of poverty alleviation.

6.3.3 Promotion of poor farmers’ participation

332 It is quite necessary to maximize the poor farmers’ participation in cause analysis of poverty, program selection and poverty alleviation planning, in order to augment their knowledge on poverty and to help them make a rational choice in choosing anti-poverty programs and measures. Usually, the poor farmers in China are ready and enthusiastic to get involved in public affairs of their community. However, they lack opportunities to participate in the activities of anti-poverty planning. Considering the above factors, the project team made serious efforts to bring the poor farmers into the poverty evaluation process, including construction of poverty indicators, analysis of poverty causes, categorization of poor households and feasibility of anti-poverty programs. During the process of participatory evaluation, the project team made full use of various qualitative methods, e.g. community forum, group discussion and household interviewing, to enrich an objective understanding of rural poverty. More important, the members of project team as well as the village cadres shifted their roles and never dominated the process of evaluation. The roles what they acted in the process were consultants and learners, the poor farmers could have maximum freedom to express their opinions. The expert group of “Participatory method and community development planning in poor rural areas ” organized by UNDP (United Nations Development Program) had benefited from adoption of an indigenous approach to encourage the poor farmers’ participation, which they used easily understandable language and participant-friendly methods to improve the outcome of participatory evaluation (UNDP, 2001). But, so far it is hard to be too optimistic about organizing the poor farmers in participatory evaluation. The existing difficulties and shortcomings include as follows: some vulnerable groups (the farmers who left the countryside and temporarily work in the urban areas) could not join the process of participatory poverty alleviation due to the time limit of the project, insufficient knowledge of poor farmers on participatory poverty alleviation and differentiated levels of poor farmers’ apprehension and expression. Therefore, in practice we need more time and energies to increase efficiency and effects when implementing participatory poverty alleviation. It is no doubted that the local residents in poor rural areas can form an effective group of planning.

6.4 Organizing the participation of poor women in the poverty alleviation planning

6.4.1 Rationale of organizing poor women's participation in the poverty alleviation planning

333 Considering the situation of rural poverty in China, one can easily visualize a striking phenomenon of feminization of poverty. From a gender perspective, rural women are poorer in material wealth, health, cultural education and political participation. Thus, the participation of women in poverty alleviation is indispensable. Another ubiquitous fact is that the women in poor areas have become the main source of labor force and played their important roles in implementing small poverty reduction programs. The experience of Shangluo County, Shanxi Province shows that in 1997 more than 75% of female labor force got involved in forestation (Zhao Junchen, 1997: 427). The case of Yao Minority Regions in Yunan Province indicated the similar experience. Most of homework and productive activities were done by women, because their husbands went to hunting and wondering in the forest (Zhao Junchen, 1997). The anti-poverty project of UNDP in Tibet also indicated that 92% of family economy managers were women. All the above examples had shown the significance of women participation in the planning of participatory poverty alleviation.

6.4.2 Role of Women's Federation in organizing poor women's participation in the poverty alleviation planning

334 Historically, women had been excluded in the mainstream of social life and dominant culture. Since 1950s, women have been mobilized and organized to participate various kinds of social activities. However, women are still neglected in the significant decision-making processes in rural areas. Most of organizations at village level (grass-root organizations) have been functionally paralyzed and women organizations lacked power to organize and advocate since 1983. Therefore, it was rare that women could participate in the activities of poverty alleviation. Through the efforts of women organizations in the rural areas, women have been organized to participate in poverty alleviation under the leadership of All-China Women's Federation. The most effective activities led by women organization were " Serial Poverty Alleviation " programs. The experiments of "Serial Poverty Alleviation" were very successful in some regions, for instance, in Luliang Region, Shanxi Province (Yang Gangjie, 1998). But, such a program had not been extended widely due to financial constraint or bureaucratic factors.

6.4.3 Practice of organizing poor women's participation in the poverty alleviation planning

335 In the course of exploring the participatory poverty alleviation method, the

project team paid special attention to women's participation in Fengning County. What the project team had done include as follows: at least one woman representative should be included in two village representatives in the community forum of poverty identification; at least two women representatives should be included in four village representatives in the planning seminar of poverty alleviation of nine villages; arranged specific women group discussions in the development areas of poverty alleviation programs; women's participation and their opinions were considered as one necessary part of participatory poverty alleviation.

6.5 Analysis on the village and county poverty alleviation development planning

6.5.1 Poverty alleviation development planning as an action system

336 The coverage and severity of poverty in rural China requires an extensive participation of government, social groups and citizens in poverty alleviation. As a matter of fact, the range of active participants in poverty alleviation since 1986 had been confined to the relevant governmental sectors, especially to those had direct relationship with the cause of poverty reduction. However, the participation of the poor was very limited. The central government adopted a working guideline in "the Outlines of Poverty Alleviation", which strengthened a top-down manner of responsibility sharing in poverty alleviation from provincial level to village level. Undoubtedly, the governmental sectors should play an indispensable role in poverty alleviation owing to their significant positions in politics and resource allocation. The poor farmers are the target population of anti-poverty, thus the planning of participatory poverty alleviation has to be implemented from the county to village level. In order to increase efficiency and effectiveness of such a comprehensive process of poverty alleviation, an action system based on mutual understanding and coordination should be established. The project team implemented its experimental work on participatory poverty alleviation in three towns and nine villages in Fengning County. The process of participation and planning had integrated the ideas and ideologies of the participants at different levels, which reflected a systematic approach of poverty alleviation.

6.5.2 Ideological input of county participation

337 In China, the county is the most important part of implementing poverty alleviation due to its substantial power and capacity in policy-making, financial allocation and administration. Thus, the ideologies of participatory poverty alleviation should be rooted at the county-level government. The conventional approach of poverty alleviation at the county level emphasized much on economic growth that mainly focused on quantity and indicators. It provided less contribution to solution of poverty problem though much impact was created on economic growth. Obviously, such a poverty alleviation approach neglected its main concern on the interests of the poor (Wu Guobao and Shen Hong, 2000). The implementation of participatory poverty alleviation at the county

level firstly had to stress the leaders' acceptance of this method. In reality, the county leaders' did not have any ideological conflict with the top-level government in implementing participatory poverty alleviation. In the evaluation work of the project team, both of top-down and bottom-up approaches were used in promoting the poor farmers' participation.

6.5.3 Respecting the local cadres' opinions and enthusiasm in rural areas

338 Some local cadres both at the county and town levels also know clearly about the condition and causes of poverty in their areas. But, the problem is how their enthusiasm could be kept and meanwhile to what extent their intention not to impose their own opinions upon the poor farmers. What the project team had done was to respect the cadres' opinions and also encouraged their institutional innovations. With the assistance and organization of Fengning County government, the project team provided training programs for the town and village cadres and assistants of poverty alleviation, which included the meanings, requirements and approaches of participatory poverty alleviation. The purpose of the training was to change these participants to the trainers for the village level training programs. The first round trainees would become the consultants and narrators in the village training programs. As discussed earlier in this report, the project team took the cadres' suggestions on revising the poverty indicators into account in the course of training meetings. The identification of poor villages was also completed based on the participants' opinion and evaluation in the training course. The local cadres who were familiar with the poverty identification system had explained clearly about the utilization of the new approach participatory poverty alleviation. Consequently, the local cadres were very willing to accept the approach of participatory poverty alleviation.

6.5.4 Emphasizing the development and planning of poverty alleviation at village level

339 The planning implementation is the fundamental part of the participatory poverty alleviation. Therefore, the project team conducted the experiments of participation poverty alleviation along with the trained county and town cadres in the poor villages, which the whole procedure met the requirements of participatory poverty alleviation and the guidelines of the central governmental policy of poverty alleviation. In the course of developing poverty alleviation programs, the project team worked with the villagers in poverty analysis and needs assessment. Based on the willingness and participation of poor households in poverty alleviation programs, the project team appropriately made these programs more focused on the poor groups. According to the requirements of the project team, there should be a number of women and the poorest farmers to be included in the village forum. In addition, both of these peasant groups were encouraged to express their opinions freely during the community forum. The planning group at the village level required each poor household got involved in discussion and identification of beneficial programs that they expected. With the rounds of group discussion and participation, the local farmers themselves would determine the feasibility of poverty

alleviation programs. Finally, the village forum would discuss on the final plan of poverty alleviation program and hand the document of finalized version to the county government. During the process of program planning, the poor farmers had dominant power in decision-making, the project team just acted as consultants and necessary supporters. In a way, it was a rehearsal of true implementation in future.

6.5.5 Emphasizing the subjectivity of poor farmers in poverty alleviation

340 In the experimental phase of participatory poverty alleviation at the village level, the project team took the situation and needs of the vulnerable groups into serious account. Also, the project team encouraged both women and the poorest farmers to take part in the village forum. In the planning process of participatory poverty alleviation, the project team adopted two major approaches in data-collection of the villagers' perceptions: village forum and household interviewing. Based on the insufficient knowledge and information about the planning of poverty alleviation, the project team emphasized much on the combination of the indigenous approaches with normative approaches. In order to guarantee and maximize the poor farmers' participation effectively in poverty alleviation, the project team and the planning group made the programs more transparent.

6.5.6 Interaction between village and county in planning of poverty alleviation

341 In the implementing process of participatory poverty alleviation, the project team stressed the integration of planning at the village level and planning at the county level. Also, the formation of the plan of poverty alleviation should be based on the first-hand data from the villages that reflected clearly the needs of the poor farmers. Both the county-level plan and the village-level plan should be determined in the process of needs assessment, poverty analysis and programs evaluation. The interaction between the county and the village should be built on the direct participation of the villager representatives.

6.5.7 Analysis and evaluation of participatory poverty alleviation at county and village levels

(1) Planning and developing participatory poverty alleviation as an institutional Innovation

342 Under the guidance of the Leading Group of Poverty Reduction of China and support of local governments, the experimental work of participatory poverty alleviation was initiated firstly in the practice of county-level poverty reduction. Thus, the poor farmers got the first opportunity to participate in the planning and development of poverty alleviation, which reflected poor farmers' willingness and abilities of participation. This was also the first time for Chinese formal organizations to implement poverty alleviation with a bottom-up approach that emphasized much on the participation of the poor. But, the

previous experience of poverty alleviation in China lacked the direct participation and decision-making of the poor people. The experiment of participatory poverty alleviation was just an empowering process that centered on the farmers' involvement. In the centrally administered environment of China, it is no doubted that it is an ideological revolution and also an institutional innovation.

(2) Planning and developing participatory poverty alleviation as a self-development process of the farmers

343 The whole planning process was based on the needs of the poor farmers that differed from the conventional approach. In the course of planning process, the poor farmers got opportunities to think over their own responsibilities and weak-points and would continue to study. After they have understood their situation and discussion, they were able to choose appropriate poverty alleviation programs. In the process of planning participatory poverty alleviation, the poor farmers got fully involved in the each phase of experiment under the guidance of the project team and planning group. Since 1983, rural China began to reform and adopt "the family contract responsibility system". Consequently, the farmers rarely participated in the collective activities. The participatory poverty alleviation could strengthen the communication among the villagers, enhance their trust on the village and town cadres and also increase social capital in the poor villages.

(3) The poor farmers need effective help from the government

344 One important issue that participatory poverty alleviation focused on is the farmers' needs to learn and to grasp new knowledge through participation. This approach provided an institutional basis for the farmers to express their true ideas and opinions. But, to what extent the farmers' expectations and opinions would meet the requirements of the designed programs became a crucial point. In reality, the poor farmers sometimes do not have much information about the high-tech programs of poverty alleviation. Also, they usually know less about the detailed contents of the program requirements. Thus, the farmers would face some difficulties in rationale choice of programs. But, with the help from the project team and planning group, the farmers will understand their problems and decide what they really need in poverty alleviation. In order to make the approach of participatory poverty alleviation successful, it is necessary for the government to provide sufficient technological information. In addition, the government should strengthen its role in providing training programs for the farmers.

(4) Strengthen the farmers' participation in planning of poverty alleviation at the county level

345 In China, the county has decisive power in resource distribution. So, how the farmers' willingness and expectations would be reflected in planning of poverty alleviation was another crucial point. Besides considering the village cadres' participation in planning, the project team had to reach an agreement with the responsible department of

county government in poverty alleviation. The county planning should be based on the needs of village planning and poor farmers. Moreover, any significant revision or amendment of program planning had to keep the farmers informed in order to enhance the mutual interaction between the village and the county in the planning process. After the confirmation of the planning, the programs should be publicized for monitoring. Thus, based on the openness of the county government and the guidelines of the central government, the problem of participation in poverty alleviation would be solved appropriately.

6.6 Function of non-government organizations in planning and developing of poverty alleviation programs

6.6.1 Function of non-governmental organization

346 It is never an easy task to provide a clear definition of non-governmental organization in China due to its special social and political institutions. In the field of poverty alleviation, Chinese government played its dominant role and non-governmental organizations tended to be relatively weak. Some social organizations that played important roles in poverty alleviation, such as China Youth Development Fund (CYDF), China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation, China Women and Youth Development Foundation and China Charity Federation, actually acted as somewhat the quasi-government. Some other small-scale organizations formed a loose but connected group in poverty alleviation (Du Xiaoshan, 1998; Pei Yonggang, 1999; Yang Gangjie, 1998). For those big civic organizations, with the financial and policy support from the government, they developed and played important roles in poverty alleviation.

6.6.2 Functions of international organizations

347 As a matter of fact, the international organizations have been the main representatives that played as model and innovative roles in poverty alleviation in China. By means of spreading normal approaches of programs management and evaluation, the international organizations helped a lot to improve the quality of Chinese government and NGOs in poverty alleviation, particularly for preventing resource loss and correcting the goals of programs (Zhao Liqing, 1998). With proceeding of poverty alleviation programs in the new century, Chinese government shows that she will further strengthen her cooperation with the international organizations to promote regional development through poverty alleviation, including the planning of poverty alleviation at the county level. However, how the international organizations will be absorbed into poverty alleviation in practice still remains as a question.

348 The international organizations might have following ways to participate in poverty alleviation in China: First, provide technical assistance. The international organizations will create positive impact on the policy of poverty alleviation in China through cooperative developing programs. Second, provide direct financial support for

poverty alleviation programs and cooperate with Chinese government through implementation of these programs. Third, provide technical assistance in program/project evaluation in poverty alleviation that will influence the future planning, for instance, the new scientific methods are very desirable for Chinese government in poverty alleviation.

6.6.3 Functions of Chinese civic organizations

349 Chinese civic organizations have played their specific roles in poverty alleviation through two approaches: First, the self-organized organizations funded by the poor farmers, which are small-scale, flexible, economical and spontaneous in program management. Second, poverty alleviation programs funded by China's foundations, which are usually coordinated with the local government and implemented by the administrative channels of the government, whose final outcome will be determined by the efficiency of administrative sectors of the local government.

350 In order to absorb more non-government organizations to participate in poverty alleviation, the government has to provide enough support to the first category social organizations and strengthen their capacity, including providing training programs and financial support. The experiment conducted by the project team in Fengning County is just an example. The project team has proposed some suggestions in building the farmers' own poverty alleviation groups. To the second category social organizations, the government should encourage them to establish independent implementation channels and adopt normal evaluation systems so as to reduce the burden of the government and increase its efficiency.

6.7 The issue of migration in poverty alleviation

6.7.1 Main methods of migration-type poverty alleviation

351 The adverse natural environment is one of the main factors attributed to poverty in certain regions, thus Chinese government had adopted a policy of migration as a useful policy tool to tackle down the poverty problem. Since 1986, Chinese government has launched some migration-type poverty alleviation projects, most of which concentrated in the "Sanxi Regions". Other fragmented migration projects have been distributed in different regions all over the country. By the end of 1998, 630,000 people had migrated from Gansu and Ningxia to the new developed regions of irrigation. Since 1993, Guangxi Autonomous Region has set up 200 settlement locations to attract 200,000 poor households from 22 backward mountain areas (Bai Nansheng, etc., 2000).

352 For Chinese migration-type poverty alleviation, two methods are mainly adopted in practice: collective removal and free removal of rural households in migration. The former has been implemented under the guidance and planning of the local government in a collective manner. The latter, however, has been implemented based on the farmers' informal linkage with the settlement places. The previous experience of collective migration has proved to be quite positive owing to the efficiency of migrant

settlements and living standard improvement. But, the collective migration can hardly meet the diversified needs of the farmers. There existed certain conflict between the migrating farmers and the local residents in the settlement places. It is particularly true if there lacks a necessary coordination arranged by the government. The experiences of Guangxi was to create a new environment for the newly arrivals in the settlement place through extensive social advocacy and mobilization. For the Diao zhuan, Ningxia Autonomous Region, the poor farmers were given sufficient freedom to make a choice that yield a welcome outcome.

6.7.2 Participation in migration-type poverty alleviation

353 Chinese government has paid serious attention to the migration-type poverty alleviation in recent years and concerned much about the participation of migrants. In the course of migrants removal, the government emphasized greatly on the rule of the farmers' willingness, which usually can be implemented as follows: first, the farmers have to apply for migration, then the farmers will be organized to visit the new settlement places after their applications have been approved, finally the farmers will make decisions for themselves to migrate or stay. In practice, the returning rate of migrants turned to be low as 2% due to the extensive participation of the villagers (Bai Nansheng, etc., 2000). The main challenge for the migrants is the production manner, local environment and cultural difference. Therefore, it is very important and pragmatic to absorb the migrants to participate in poverty alleviation. In the western regions, the local government encouraged and guided the poor farmers to migrate by means of advocacy, organizing visit tours and meetings. The facts had indicated that the migration-type poverty alleviation was successful and became a policy of the local government. Of course, what the farmers concerned greatly is the life quality they can maintain after migration. The experience of Baise region, Guangxi province, in the migration-type poverty alleviation deserves our attention, which stressed much on improvement of the life quality. However, it is still difficult for the government to create a good living environment for the huge number of migrants through social mobilization at the current stage.

6.8 Recommendations and policy implications for the planning of participatory poverty alleviation at the county level

6.8.1 Inclusion of the participatory approach into planning of poverty alleviation

354 The previous experience of poverty alleviation indicated that the officials did not know much about the true situation of poverty and their clients of poverty reduction. The officials' decision instead of the farmers' did not have a solid basis of democracy. Moreover, there existed a differentiated interest gap between the governmental officials and the poor farmers. The missing of poverty alleviation funds just is an example that proved the gap. Therefore, it is very necessary to absorb the farmers into the planning of poverty alleviation, particularly the participation of women and poor farmers is

valuable. The poor farmers understand their situation clearly and know what they really need in poverty reduction. Only their needs are expressed and met can a planning of poverty alleviation succeed and the subjectivity of the target population can be maintained.

6.8.2 Absorbing the farmers' participation as an empowering process

355 It is unnecessary to link participatory poverty alleviation with the farmers' aimless complaining or their pretending agreement dominated by the governmental officials. However, participation initially is an empowering process of the poor farmers, which emphasizes their self-choice and self-design with necessary support of the government. It can also be considered as a process of farmers' capacity-building. More important, this process should not be regarded as a reduction of formal power but a journey of mutual learning and cooperation between different actors in poverty alleviation.

6.8.3 Farmers' participation as an evolution of consensus

356 The consensus between various participants in the planning process is the fundamental requirement for an effective and successful outcome. Under the guidelines of the central governmental policy on poverty alleviation, to reach an agreement is very likely to happen in practice. Owing to the insufficient information and experience in participatory planning, the farmers need external information support. Therefore, one direct approach to strengthen the farmers' accessibility of necessary information is to provide them on-site-consultation and equip the villages with some information tools, including posters, TVs and broadcasting facilities.

6.8.4 Farmers' in-depth and extensive participation

357 The sanction of participatory poverty alleviation planning at the county level should be considered as a whole process of implementation, including villagers-discussion, village -planning and county-planning. The farmers should get involved in the whole process of planning in order to make the programs reflect fully the needs and willingness of the poor farmers. The farmers need external information to support their judgments in planning due to their limited opportunity to access to the decision-making process. Thus, in the course of planning at the county level, it is necessary for the government to bring the farmers into the process and consider the needs of the true target population in poverty alleviation. Before the village planning is integrated to the county planning, the farmers' participation is indispensable. Otherwise, it is very likely to neglect the true needs of the poor farmers in program planning. The county planning sector should avoid any harm to the farmers' interests and should keep close coordination with the local cadres. Any change or amendment in planning should be publicized, in addition, a healthy interaction between the village planning group and the county planning group should be encouraged.

6.8.5 Emphasizing the farmers' significant participation

358 Obviously, the input of resources, including time, labor force and money, is needed in participatory poverty alleviation. However, there is a big lack of resources for the poor villages and farmers. Based on the consideration of resource condition in the poor villages, the project team paid much attention to the roles of the farmers' participation in the crucial stages of poverty alleviation, for instance, program selection, priority arrangement, program integration at the village and county levels and program monitoring. The farmers' participation should be stressed in the implementation of participatory poverty alleviation.

6.8.6 Training of cadres as a guarantee for farmers' participation

359 The cadres both at the county level and town level played significant roles in the planning process of participatory poverty alleviation. Only these cadres recognize and understand the values and methods of participatory poverty alleviation can make their work more efficient and successful. It is necessary to find out the connection between the cadres' conventional approach and the new approach that will strengthen the realization of program goals.

6.8.7 Reforming the administrative system of poverty alleviation as the key element

360 As we know, the participatory poverty alleviation has been implemented within the mature centralized administrative system, which the officials' attitude and performance will be the main negative factors to induce a failure of poverty reduction. Moreover, the guidelines of poverty alleviation at the county level did not match with the governmental ideas of economic development. In practice, many county leaders just have concerned with economic indicators and neglected the social benefits of poverty alleviation programs. The implementation of participatory poverty alleviation programs has met obvious challenge from the less-effective administrative system. Thus, reforming the current poverty alleviation mechanism becomes an unavoidable choice.

6.8.8 Continuous support needed for the new planning of poverty alleviation

361 It is necessary to provide continuous support for the participatory poverty alleviation programs within the mature centralized administrative system, including providing training programs for the local cadres and responsible leaders in the field of poverty alleviation, spreading the successful experience of participatory poverty alleviation programs and organizing seminar on the participatory poverty alleviation approach. Undoubtedly, Chinese government has made clear statements in "the Guidelines of Poverty Alleviation" and the responsible administrative sectors are also active in implementing these programs. Therefore, the international organizations can make full use of such a positive institutional arrangement and play more important

roles in poverty alleviation in China.

Reference

Bai Nansheng, etc., 2000, *Migration-type poverty alleviation in rural China: methods and experiences*, Administrative World, No.3.

China Disabled Persons Federation (CDPF), 2001, *The executive situation about "9-5" program for the undertaking about the disabled in China*, (unpublished) .

Chang Ying, etc., 1994, *An observation on nutrition and improving effect of children before school age in the poor areas of China*, Sanitary Research, No. 1.

Du Xiaoshan, etc., 1998, *A consideration on poverty-alleviation-group-type poverty alleviation*, Rural Economics of China, No. 6.

Gao Yuxi, 1996, *Manpower capital investment and economic growth in the poor areas of China*, Administrative World, No. 5.

Pei Yonggang, etc., 1999, *A combination of poverty alleviation: a kind of effective poverty alleviation aimed at poor rural households*, Rural Economics, No. 2.

Press Bureau of State Department, 2001, *White Paper of Chinese Rural Poverty Alleviation and Exploitation*, Economic Daily, October 16.

Rural Social and Economic Investigation Group, SSB, *A rural poverty monitoring report in China*, 2000, China Statistic Publishing.

Shen Hong, 2000, *A sociology comment on researches in poverty of China*, Sociologic Research, No. 2.

Shen Hong, 2001, *The community mechanism of institutional innovation in the poverty alleviation*, (Interior draft).

The World Bank, 2001, *China conquers rural poverty*, China financial & economic publishing

Wu Guobao, 2001, *A discussion on the policy of poverty alleviation with a low loan interest*, China Poverty Alleviation Fund Commission: 《The elite essays about poverty alleviation in China》, China Economic Press

Xu Feiqiong, 2000, *A research on poverty in China*, Economic Comment.

Yang Gangjie, etc., 1998, *A mode of assistance and guidance: organizing, investing and teaching women in the poor areas*, China's Rural Observation, No. 4.

Zhao Junchen, 1997, *Theories and practices at hard core poverty alleviation in China*, Yunnan Science & Technology Publishing.

Zhao Liqing, 1998, *Poverty alleviation undertaking of NGOs*, Rural Economics of China, No. 9.