



## Wagging the dragon's tail: emerging practices in participatory poverty reduction in China





# PART V:

Experiences by  
professionals –  
participatory  
approaches in  
health and  
education



# Introduction

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LU CAIZHEN is a research fellow at the Centre for Mountain Ecosystem Studies at the Kunming Institute of Botany. Her research areas include: i) poverty studies and rural development; ii) gender analysis; iii) participatory research, participation and local governance; vi) natural resource management and sustainable livelihoods; and v) climate change and local adaptation. She uses both qualitative and quantitative approaches and has published several papers in international academic journals.

The quality of human agency is enhanced by better education and health (Anand and Sen, 1997).<sup>1</sup> However, in China, both health and education services have met major challenges during the process of rapid growth and transition, in particular in rural areas (Khan *et al.*, 1999). In rural areas health and education services were traditionally provided through the collectives.

After the dismantling of the collective economy (from 1979), local health and education services have faced major challenges with regard to funding and staffing. Poor quality of education and excessive school fees were seen as main reasons for keeping poor children out of school. A simi-

lar story emerged from the health sector. While the wealthier section of the Chinese population has benefited from advanced health technologies, the poor have lost access to even the most essential services. Rising fees have forced the poor and low-income population groups to minimise their use of health services. Failure to seek medical attention when unwell has increased the risk for entire communities to spread diseases (WHO, 2006).<sup>2</sup>

There have been a number of projects trying to address these problems since the late 1990s, but it was not until the 11th Five Year Programme (2006-2010) that the government has paid increasing attention

<sup>1</sup> Human agency is the capacity for human beings to make choices and to impose those choices on the world. Source: *Wikipedia*.

<sup>2</sup> WHO, China State Council Development Research Center: China – Health, poverty and economic development. Beijing, 2006.

to the delivery of basic public service.

In the education sector 'quality of education' became an important theme from 1999. Since 2002 the government pushed to achieve compulsory education for all children in rural and urban areas. Under the 11th Five Year Plan (2006-2010) the government implemented a compulsory education finance reform to address inequalities in the education sector. This included measures to target individual poor students (rather than poor areas, like under previous policies), in particular through the two exemptions for all students (from miscellaneous fees and school book fees) and one subsidy (boarding subsidies), targeted at poor students.<sup>3</sup>

Projects supported by World Bank and DfID focused on the introduction of a demand-led approach, in particular the demands of teachers and parents for better education services. It was understood that if the quality of school services improve more children will attend schools. The Gansu Basic Education Project (GBEP) was designed in 1999 and completed in 2006. It was a highly successful project which piloted a complex set of innovative methods and approaches to improve quality of basic education in poor areas of Gansu Province. The basic approach was to focus on school development, participatory training methods and specific measures to target disadvantaged children. The project concept included principles of community involvement and participation in the new curriculum reform and development which were later incorporated in the promotion of 'nine-year basic compulsory education programme'. An important element was the so-called 'school development plans'

which were seen as important tools to close the gap between top-down allocation of priorities (through the Five Year Plans) and local needs.<sup>4</sup> Another important innovation was the introduction of participatory teaching techniques as described in Li Jianru's case study.

The following three cases show how the transition to a demand-led approach has changed the attitudes, roles and even behaviour of the professionals.

**Yu Denghai** describes an innovative approach which enables women to participate in public health planning in Zhenning County. The article explores participatory institutional building and maintenance and ways of integrating health knowledge into local people's lives. In Zhenning, the local health sector does not target local women except via one or two clinic doctors at the village committee level. However, these busy doctors seldom have time to educate local women about health issues. This article explores how Health Promotion Groups and 'demonstrative households for health promotion' are helping to educate local women on ways to protect their health and improve their quality of life.

**Li Jianru** explores how participatory teaching in big class is challenging the traditional style of 'cramming teaching'. She describes how she changed from a traditional paternalistic teaching style to a more facilitating role. Students were no longer passive learning recipients, but actively involved in learning. Li Jianru's approach aims to promote communication and break the psychological gap between teachers and students. By bringing participation in their lives, Li Jianru aims to help open students' minds, encourage their creativity

<sup>3</sup> See: World Bank. 2008. Review of 11th Five Year Plan. World Bank. 2009: China – Education Sector Review.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank Education Sector Review (2009, p. 42). School development plans take into consideration not only the regular functions and operating cost, but also the specific needs of the school and the community (e.g. the number of left-behind children served, the problem of drop out among girls), and the required resources to carry out the strategy to address the problem. The school development plans' budget can be aggregated to the county level and then eventually aggregated up to the province for submission to the central government for allocation.

and bring about positive change for the future.

**Wang Jun, Wang Xiaodong, Yang Dou, Yu Fei, Lin Shu, Lin Xiaojie, Wen Yi and Yang Yu** present a case study about the Chengdu Gay Care Organisation (CGCO). This article reflects an even more decisive shift in within the participation continuum. The article describes how men who have sex with men (MSM) were involved in policy-

making to address their needs and priorities. The most successful aspect of the case study is that the project created opportunities for them to become involved in the process in the first place – and that these usually vulnerable and marginalised groups became active participants and actors. The article also describes how participants were able to build their capacity through their involvement in the project process.

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