

Preface

by ALAN PIAZZA

The Poor Rural Communities Development Project (PRCDP) is the fourth of a series of village-based multi-sectoral poverty reduction projects supported by the World Bank in China. The process began with a careful analysis of poverty in China through the 1992 World Bank collaborative study – *China: Strategies for Reducing Poverty in the 1990s*.¹ That study recommended that a multi-sectoral approach was essential to overcoming poverty in China's worst affected areas. This included support for basic rural infrastructure, basic education and healthcare, farm production, and access to off-farm employment. This and the study's other recommendations were put into action in the first two poverty reduction projects:

- the Southwest Poverty Reduction Project (beginning in 1995); and
- the Qinba Mountains Poverty Reduction Project (beginning in 1997).²

The importance of participation was recognised in these first two projects. In fact, the Southwest project was one of World Bank President Wolfensohn's 'participation flagship' projects. However, following a strong emphasis on participation during project preparation and early implementation, the initially heavy focus on participation dissipated.

In 2001, the World Bank's second major study of poverty in China – *China: Overcoming Rural Poverty*,³ called for the more efficient and effective use of available poverty reduction funding in China through 'greater community participation in project design and implementation'. The Chinese government's poverty reduction strategy at that time, *China: Rural Poverty Alleviation and Development Programme: 2001-2010*, also called for strengthening the participatory approach in poverty reduction work.⁴ The government's docu-

¹ <http://go.worldbank.org/7OZ1WCW200>

² For more information see: www.worldbank.org

³ <http://go.worldbank.org/MN1DQS5690>

⁴ www.gov.cn/english/official/2005-07/27/content_17712.htm

ment regarded 'the poor as the main body conducting and benefiting from the poverty alleviation and development striving', and noted concrete steps to support empowerment at the village level. Most importantly, a simplified participatory approach was adopted in formulating village poverty reduction plans. Nationwide, all of the more than 140,000 key poor villages established such plans on the basis of the participatory approach. The government's stated interest in strengthening participation in poverty reduction set the stage at the turn of the millennium for a variety of international groups to assist with the evolution and deepening of a strong participatory approach in China.

Leveraging this favorable policy environment, PRCDP has done an excellent job of designing and developing its participatory approach. It has spearheaded participation in large scale projects for all of rural China. Beginning with the first Identification Mission in October 2001, the project's participatory approach has played a central role in the design and implementation of all six project components. It has aimed to empower local communities and promote the inclusion of all disadvantaged social groups throughout the project cycle. The participatory approach has been an empowering process that emphasised the voices and choices of different groups in the community. It built their ownership of – and capacities for – self-reliant community development. A Participation Manual was developed during the project preparation period to provide guidance to management staff and county and township facilitators on how to implement and monitor the participatory approach. The Participation Manual describes the basic principles of the approach, details the main steps in the participatory project cycle, elaborates institutional and management issues in using the approach, discusses its costs and bene-

fits, and provides some resource material on methods and tools.⁵

The provincial project management offices (PPMO) of Guangxi, Sichuan and Yunnan played a key role in testing and developing the participatory approach over the last decade during project preparation, implementation and evaluation. The PPMOs devoted their greatest energy and resources to the participatory approach, and it is striking that their enthusiasm and support for participation grew continually over the last ten years! The county level project management offices and the lower level township and village project work stations also played a vital role in the development and roll out of the participatory approach at the local level. Of course, the 1.4 million project villagers themselves were the key players in participation at the local level. Their passion for PRCDP and for participation has also grown over time. In addition, the central government authorities provided constant support for PRCDP and for the participation throughout project preparation, implementation and evaluation.

The success of participation in PRCDP could not have been achieved without the wonderfully generous support of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID). Not only would there not have been a PRCDP project in the absence of DfID's major grant support, but DfID also provided substantial grants to help design and supervise the evolution of PRCDP's participatory approach and the comprehensive qualitative project participatory assessments over the entire life of the project. The lead ITAD staff joined the World Bank team on each and every PRCDP preparation and supervision mission over the last ten years, which was key to the success of PRCDP's participatory approach.⁶ ITAD's annual qualitative project participatory

⁵ www.itad.com/PRCDP

⁶ The lead guest-editor of this issue, Johanna Pennarz, is a consultant at ITAD (www.itad.com)

assessments also played a key role in the project's success. They provided some of the best documentation of the project's strengths and weaknesses, and set a new standard for qualitative participatory assessments in China. The final report on the participatory impact evaluation of PRCDP is under preparation and will be available soon.

Clearly, PRCDP's participatory

approach was a tremendous group effort. With the sustained support of the project villagers, the PPMOs and project management at all levels, DfID and ITAD and the World Bank team, the PRCDP participatory approach has been enormously successful. In my view, PRCDP is the cutting edge of participation in China and has served to greatly advance community empowerment in all of rural China.

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