

Chapter 6

A Case Study of Shangyan Village, Pingshan Township, Luquan County

Luquan Yi and Miao Nationalities Autonomous County, an upland and poor area in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region, was selected for the case study. In order to understand the policy process, policy impact, interface between policies, and land degradation, Shangyan Village, a typical land degradation site in Pingshan Township of Luquan County, was chosen for field work at the community level.

There are 81 households and 308 people (161 men and 147 women) in the village. Although Luquan is a Yi and Miao national autonomous county in Yunnan, most of the population in the village are Han. The average landholding is 0.034 ha per person. The average annual income is 1,040 yuan per capita. The average grainholding is 205 kg per capita.

Surrounded by hills and mountains, Shangyan Village is located in a valley. A small river flows through a reservoir that has become flat land because of serious soil erosion and sedimentation. The sediment in the reservoir increased by almost 10 cm per year. Every summer, heavy

rain brings floods to the small village. Farmers have to rebuild and repair their cropland each year. Watershed and soil erosion becomes more and more serious because of deforestation, mining, and reclamation in the mountains. The situation is typical in the county and throughout Yunnan Province.

The objectives of this field work were as follow.

- To identify stakeholders who can affect or be affected by land policies and their implementation and by land management inside and outside the community
- To recognise the responses of stakeholders to land policies
- To compare the rights of men and women to the land
- To understand the people's livelihood, land use, and natural resource management in the community
- To identify access patterns of land-users
- To analyse the interface between policies and land management

- To find the reasons for land degradation and to provide suggestions for countermeasures

This field work was carried out by means of anthropological methodologies such as PRA (participatory rural appraisal), semi-structured interviews through checklists, interviews of important figures, and group discussion.

In China, the most powerful stakeholders are government departments at national, provincial, and local levels. These government organisations are responsible for policy-making, policy implementation, and policy readjustment. Land policies are implemented from the top to the bottom. Various community-level organisations of the government are responsible for carrying out policies. Through these organisations, policies are brought to every village, every family, and every person.

6.1 Social Organisations and Land Policy Implementation Process

The lowest government organisation in the village is Yanwachong Office. There are nine positions in the office; three are full-time and the others are part-time. The full-time staff are the party branch secretary of Yanwachong Office, the director and the accountant. Six part-time staff include the forest protector, family-planning worker, agricultural technical worker, health care worker, women's director, and veterinarian. One of them is a woman and responsible for women's affairs in the office. Yanwachong Office looks after 11 natural villages, 421 households and 1,709 people, of whom 1,107 are Han, 62 Yi, 147 Miao, and 387 Lisu.

Every land policy is put into effect in the community by the office. Policies are implemented from a higher level to a lower

level. Implementation in the community is usually delayed. For instance, the central government issued the Household Contract Responsibility System in 1978 to distribute land to individuals. Yanwachong Office started to implement the policy in 1981. All land was distributed by 1982.

The farmers enthusiastically supported the policy during the implementation process. They wanted to manage land and production by themselves, but they worried that it might not happen. On the other hand, administrators delayed because policies changed so fast and often in the opposite direction to before. They feared that they would lose their positions if they implemented a wrong policy. For example, before 1978, supporting privatisation was seen as a serious mistake. A special method was created for dealing with the special situation. Lands were not distributed to individuals immediately. Instead, land-use rights were distributed to production teams (a natural village) in 1981. There were reasons for doing it this way. The production team was the smallest collective. If the policy was wrong and did not continue, the mistake of running a private-ownership system could be avoided and it was easy to return to the old rules. On the other hand, if the policy continued, they had already taken the first step on the new way through their actions. When in 1982 it was obvious that the policy would continue, administrators took the second step of distributing land to individuals.

This example shows the typical implementation process of national policies. Administrators with different understandings of policies produce different results in policy implementation. People often complain that policy implementation is slow and deviates from its path. On the other hand, the administrators of community-level organisations often complain that they have to

confront lots of challenges. They have to work according to policies and orders from various higher organisations; and they also have to consider the farmers and local situation. Policies are not always suitable. Stakeholders representing different economic and political power groups are often in conflict with each other because of differing interests and views. The community-level office plays a role as a negotiator between higher levels and farmers.

The process of policy implementation from Luquan County to Shangyan Village has to take three steps: from the county government to Pingshan Township government, from the township government to Yanwachong Office, and from the office to Shangyan Village. The staff of Yanwachong Office and the head of Shangyan Village carry out the policy at the community level. They usually hold meetings to discuss a work plan and use means such as broadcast, backboard report, panels and slogans to inform farmers about the policy. The most useful method is to visit families in the village and talk to them. Routine government work is also linked from higher levels to lower levels. For instance, routine forest work is carried from the forest bureau in the county to the forest station in the township, then from the station to the forest protector in the office.

In the process of policy implementation, leaders in the community play the most important roles. These people often have some special background such as higher education or having a powerful relative in the community. They have much influence in the village. The staff from the office are not only rural leaders, but also farmers. Their families are living in the villages. All of them take part in agricultural work. Most, except for the three full-time staff, cannot support themselves with their wages. They have to work in the fields or find non-agricultural work.

6.2 Farmers and Land Management

Farmers in Shangyan Village consist of the largest group of land-users. In rural China, collectives own land and farmers are the land contractors. They can only use land that the office distributed to them in the early 1980s. They can not buy or sell land and only have the rights to use land. The farmers pay agricultural tax to the state.

In 1982, Shangyan started to practice the economic reform policy. All collective lands were distributed to every family. Sixty per cent of the land was distributed according to the population size and the other 40 per cent was distributed according to labour. Before 1992, landholdings were readjusted every five years. Families whose landholdings decreased returned the extra shares. Most decreases in population were caused by death and immigration. Families whose numbers increased received additional shares. Families that had to give up land used to return poor quality land. So poor quality land changed hands frequently. After 1992, the central government stated that land contracts would not be changed for the next 30 years in order to protect farmers' rights to land use in the long term. Land readjustment stopped. From 1992 to 1998, because of population change and limited land, the average landholding in every family changed. Individuals in families that increase in size now face decreasing living standards because of land shortage and a lack of non-agricultural work. Some families decreasing in size are not able to manage their land because of shortages of labour or investment. Therefore, some families let other families use their lands to produce crops and tobacco and obtain money and crops. Transferring 0.066 ha of tobacco land can yield around 350 *yuan* per year.

There are two perspectives on land readjustment or land contract stability. Leaders in the office argue that it is necessary to keep the land contract stable. When lands were readjusted every five years, the poor land along the river was given up first. No one really cared for this land. It used to be passed from household to household. No ownership means lack of responsibility. So the land deteriorated and became useless. Land readjustment caused land degradation. On the other hand, farmers have a different perspective. There are few opportunities for them to find non-agricultural jobs in villages or towns. Most farmers are dependent on the land. They say *"Some families have to support three persons on one parcel of land. Two persons do not have land. They cannot enjoy the land equally. A gap appears between rich and poor. So land readjustment is necessary and should be practised to ensure the basic needs and living standards when the number of people in a family increases."*

6.3 Women's Right to Land

Women are the main users of land and important stakeholders in land management. They perform 70 per cent of the work in the village and have an important responsibility in the agricultural system. However, they do not have full rights to land use and decision-making. The government has tried for a long time to give equal rights to women. When land was distributed in 1982, women—including unmarried girls—obtained shares.

In many rural areas, such as Shangyan Village, however, there is a gap between the ideal and reality. Rural people have a traditional patriarchal family system. If a woman marries a husband from another village, she leaves the community and loses her share of land without any compensation. Even if she marries a man in the same village, she cannot use the land

of her previous family. Her brothers or other men in the family will take her share of land. Land is always handed down to men in families. A divorced woman without a son often becomes homeless with no land to use. There are often rules to prevent a woman's husband entering a community because land and natural resources are limited. A man who marries a woman from another village cannot register as a community member of his wife's village if the woman has a brother. If a family has no son, only one daughter is allowed to let her husband live with her in her village. Although legally men and women have the same rights to land, the reality is different. Traditional practices tend to deny women rights to land.

6.4 People's Livelihood and Land Use in the Community

In order to understand land degradation in the community, we need to consider local people's livelihoods. In the upland, local people's activities for subsistence directly affect environmental sustainability. In Shangyan Village, there are two harvests a year: wheat and beans in the spring; and rice, tobacco, and corn in the autumn. Cultivated lands in the village can be classified into two types: paddy field and rain-fed cropland. Labour allocation and production are still traditional. Men are in charge of important and heavy work. Women are responsible for less important but time-consuming and troublesome work such as collecting fuelwood, preparing manure, transplanting seedlings, and growing vegetables.

The agriculturally busy season is from the end of the third month to the tenth month (lunar month). Tobacco and other crops are raised. Raising tobacco and dry-processing need a lot of time and labour. Tobacco is the most important cash crop and rice is the staple food. During the off-

season from the eleventh month to the second month of the following year, young men often move into cities or towns to find work because there is no work to do on the land.

After paying agricultural tax, few householders have crops to sell. In fact, more than half of the householders have to buy rice and other grains when they sell tobacco. Wheat, corn, and beans are important foods when the rice is insufficient. About seven families do not have enough grain and income to meet their basic needs.

Farmers think the main reason they could not produce enough food is the shortage of land. When landholdings per capita became smaller because of population growth, farmers started to exploit mountain land and other natural resources for subsistence. Some unsustainable activities, such as deforestation, reclamation of steep slopes, and mining, appeared. For most local people, however, these activities did not bring anything but floods and degraded surroundings. About 0.4 ha of land along the river are washed away by floods almost every year. With the heavy rains in 1998, flooding covered 1.33 ha. Some paddy fields produced about 13,500 kg per ha of rice in the past, but only produce about 5,400 kg per ha now. Rice production per family decreased by 1,000 kg in 1998. Farmers cannot sell all of their tobacco because the tobacco firm in the county cut its purchasing requirements. Unshelled tobacco was piled high near every house in the village.

6.5 Natural Resources, Environmental Degradation and Land Policies

Natural resources in Shangyan Village are limited and degraded because of unsus-

tainable activities. Most of the forest has gone. The main vegetation on the hills and mountains is in the form of bushes, shrubs, and grasses. Reclamation, deforestation, and mining have aggravated environmental degradation and led to increasing poverty.

The head of Shangyan Village told us that 40 people do not have a share of cropland and have to reclaim mountain land. During the 12 years from 1985 to 1997, reclaimed mountain land increased by 3.33 ha in the village. About 3 ha are used to plant tobacco to earn money. About two-thirds of reclaimed lands are illegal. Although villagers are fined each year, they continue to use the land. The population has increased by 65 per cent in the village over the past 27 years but the village's legal landholding remained the same. According to the land and forest polices, reclamation on slopes over 25° is forbidden. In 1998, Shangyan Village voted in a new head. The first thing he did was to address illegal reclamation. At the same time, some wastelands that were contracted to a company for mining have returned to the village because the contract expired. The new head called on every family to plant Chinese chestnut trees on the wastelands and illegally reclaimed lands. Each family received a share of the land after reforestation.

The head said: *"It is good for both farmers and forest officers. Most of the villagers are happy to get a share of the land. Before the trees grow, farmers will plant crops with the trees. After the trees mature, they harvest Chinese chestnuts. The officers are also happy to solve the problem of illegal reclamation."*

The village head understands the relationship between people's livelihood and land conservation. Community conservation needs to benefit local people.

6.6 Deforestation and Improper Forest Policies

In the Great Leap Forward Movement at the end of the 1950s, deforestation for fuel to smelt steel destroyed much forest in Shangyan Village. The second period of deforestation happened in 1984–85 when the government contracted forest land to households, and villagers started to fell the trees. Many trees in Shangyan Village disappeared in one year. Although the county government recognised that this policy was wrong and tried to stop it by returning individual deforested land to collectives, the order was not put into effect because they feared it might cause further deforestation if the policy was changed so extremely. From this example, it can be seen that policy can affect land use and management. Also the use of land by stakeholders can affect policy-making and policy implementation. About 13 years have passed and people can now see the situation more clearly. A group of local people discussed the topic and concluded the following.

- Extreme change of ownership

In the past, farmers had been educated in idea of public ownership. *"Every tree or straw belongs to the collective."* Overnight, things changed completely. People did not find it easy to adapt to the new situation. They could not accept the fact that individuals themselves now owned hundreds of trees. They did not know how to deal with so many trees. They did not know the use of the trees and how to manage the forest.

- Lack of confidence in the new policy

The policy changed so fast and was so different from the past. Although villagers were satisfied with the policy, they feared that the good time could not last long. Almost every farmer had had bad experi-

ences with policy change. They did not believe a policy could continue for a long time. They were not able to consider the future, but just thought of the rights and benefits of the present.

- 'A free dinner'

Farmers received the forest at no cost. It was an unexpected 'free dinner'. People did not value trees because they did not pay for them. People did not feel guilty, when they stole other people's trees.

Now, as a result of deforestation, some people have to travel far to collect fuelwood in other communities' forests. Collecting fuelwood is the women's responsibility. Deforestation has created more work for women. With deforestation, floods and other disasters are increasing and more serious. The community faces a situation of decreasing outputs and land degradation. Local farmers have tasted the bitter fruit of environmental degradation. Now they have recognised land degradation is serious. They do not cut trees and fuelwood in the mountains. They want to plant trees and are against mining.

6.7 Mining and Interests of Stakeholders

Now there are six mining sites near Shangyan Village. Although government organisations try to control the mined acreage, mining is another human activity that has caused environmental degradation in the area. The head of Shangyan Village said:

"Mining has had a negative influence on our living conditions. The condition of the land is deteriorating and output is dropping. I am strongly against mining. My view represents not only that of our village, but also of ten other villages in the Yanwachong Office."

Although both the local people and policy are strongly against illegal mining, legal mining activities continue in the area.

If illegal reclamation is considered as subsistence activity, mining should be seen as an activity for making money. Compared with reclamation, there are fewer participants and they are better off than the farmers. Miners can be organisations or individuals from inside or outside the community. For instance, a collective enterprise of Pingshan Township contracted to mine land in Shangyan five years ago. It paid 8,000 yuan. When the contract expired, the land was in poor condition.

One miner told us how he obtained mining rights. The application process is as follows: village to Yanwachong Office to mining-control committee of township to forest station of township to land bureau of county. All processes have taxes such as forest tax, land tax, reforestation tax, and other taxes for management. He applied to mine 0.13/ha of land. He paid over 1,000 yuan in taxes. In addition, he had to pay the Yanwachong Office when mining started. Transporting one truck of ore from the community costs 50 yuan.

From the above process, it is clear that people who can mine are not common people. They not only have better economic conditions, but also have some relationship with government organisations. In fact, miners and some organisations share an interest in mining. One forest staff member said: *"Mining is good for reforestation. When ore and stone are taken from the land, it is good to plant trees."* Local people who suffer from the results of mining obtain nothing. So farmers are strongly against mining although the leaders in the village are not so dissatisfied.

The above analysis shows that deforestation, reclamation, and mining are the

main factors leading to land degradation. Local people have the following suggestions for future land-use.

- To close the mountains for reforestation
- To return illegally reclaimed land to forest
- To stop mining
- To repair the reservoir and harness the river

6.8 Policy Impact in Contemporary History

Before 1949, landlords and rich farmers made up 20 per cent of the population and owned about 80 per cent of the cropland. In order to abolish the old land system, eradicate all forms of exploitation, and meet the land need of poor farmers, the central government of new China issued the Land Reform Law in 1949.

Luquan County started to carry out the Land Reform Law in 1952. Land reform teams were organised and went to every village. The status of every family was identified according to its landholding quantity, exploitation quantity, and the degree of taking part in work. The class status in rural areas was divided into landlord, rich farmer, middle farmer, and poor farmer. The lands, houses, tools, and cattle of landlords were confiscated and redistributed.

Land reform was completed in Luquan County in November 1952. The old land system was destroyed completely. The landholding quantity and productive material of every person was equal and even. After land reform, poor farmers became enthusiastic producers. In Luquan, the total output of grain reached 50,475 tonnes and grain-holdings per capita were 135 kg in 1952, an increase of 14 per cent compared to 1949.

However, some poor farmers lacked land-management skills and experienced poor economic conditions; they had to sell their land, especially when they faced natural and man-made calamities. Rich farmers started to buy the land. Thus a new polarisation began. In order to prevent this trend, it was considered necessary to abolish private ownership of productive materials. Cooperatives were established as an experiment in 1954 in Luquan. People, along with their land, productive materials, and cattle, joined cooperatives. After agricultural cooperation transformation was completed in 1956, 192 cooperatives operated in Luquan. All farmers earned their income and grain according to their working contribution to the cooperatives. Private ownership of productive materials was replaced by public ownership. However, every family had a small plot of land to plant vegetables or cash crops and raise pigs and chickens. At the same time, private mountains and trees also joined the cooperatives. However, because of the low compensation, many households cut their trees before joining the cooperatives. Deforestation took place everywhere.

In 1958, the central government initiated the Great Leap Forward. In the spring ploughing season, the government of Luquan County used military methods to manage agricultural production. More than 60,000 farmers were organised into contingents of the people's militia to complete the Great Leap Forward in agriculture. The target for the average yield of grain was 15,000 kg per ha (it was actually 2,220 kg per ha in 1957) and for average grain-holding per capita 1,500 kg (it was actually 156 kg).

Then the 192 cooperatives were merged into 12 People's Communes. Members of

the communes were not allowed to carry out household production. Markets were closed. Vegetable land, domestic animals, and fruit trees were taken into communes. Public dining rooms were opened. Many labourers were put to build irrigation structures, repair roads, and make steel, leaving only the old, sick, and children to take part in agricultural work. As in other rural areas in China, serious starvation affected the county from 1959 to 1961.

During the Steel-Production Movement in the Great Leap Forward, there were three big sites and dozens of small sites for making steel in Luquan. Trees were cut and made into charcoal to smelt the iron. The forest almost ran out of fuel. Even some religious forests did not avoid the destruction. Forests that had been conserved for a thousand years disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. This caused the greatest deforestation since new China had been established.

In order to provide pit props for Dongchuan Copper Mine, the forest was cut. For example, 4,300 sq.m of wood was cut in the Wanbaoshan forest of Luquan County. However, according to investigation teams from the Yunnan Forest Bureau and Yunnan Transportation Bureau in 1960, 5,680 sq.m. of wood were waiting to go to Dongchuan because of transportation problems; 3,800 sq.m. of wood rotted because of poor management.

The results of the Great Leap Forward were tragic. Luquan County experienced three years of starvation, the rural economy was broken, and the natural environment destroyed. The forest cover in Luquan County decreased from 46.2 per cent in 1950 to 23.5 per cent in 1973.