

## CONCLUSIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR THE FUTURE

A number of conclusions regarding off-farm employment in Mianchi township emerges from this case study. These are outlined in this chapter.

In spite of the current low level of development of off-farm employment in Mianchi township, a number of favourable conditions exists. These include regional and seasonal advantages for growing fruits and vegetables, unique traditional skills, rich water resources, and relatively good access to outside markets. At the same time, constraints to the development of off-farm activities include lack of knowledge and experience, lack of skilled personnel, shortage of funds, and lack of successful "models". Activities such as fruit and vegetable cultivation, *Qiang* embroidery, and the Hydropower station have helped to increase the use of local advantages. However, most of the advantages are still not fully developed.

There is no activity that can be termed particularly prominent in terms of employment and income in this township. Several activities, including horticulture, livestock-raising, sideline activities, industries, transportation, and tertiary activities have contributed to the generation of whatever off-farm employment there is at present.

The regional variation of off-farm employment in this township is considerable. Generally speaking, the valley villages have better opportunities for off-farm activities outside agriculture, while mountain villages have advantages for the development of off-farm activities related to agriculture.

The off-farm activities related to agriculture, such as horticulture and sideline activities, have become the major source of income and employment for the poorer groups. However, the participation of low-income groups in off-farm activities outside agriculture is very low. No special policies exist at present to help the low income groups. Nevertheless, non-farm activities have created both permanent as well as seasonal employment for the local people, while off-farm activities within agriculture have only generated seasonal employment. Generally speaking, the labour demand of most off-farm activities does not greatly hamper farm activity.

### Guidelines for the Future

1. Off-farm activities within agriculture have greater potentials and provide easier access to most of the households and to females than jobs outside agriculture. The focus should be on off-farm activities within agriculture in the near future. The development of non-farm activities should be based on locally available resources and outside technology and funds.
2. Horticultural activities, such as growing apples, peppers, and vegetables, not only have a higher output-input rate and productivity than traditional crops, but also have promising markets in both local areas and outside. In addition, the land area for growing cash crops is extensive. The growing of vegetables can greatly enhance the use of cultivated land. According to the estimates by local key informants, the area of land suitable for growing cash trees is at least three times as much as the current area devoted to fruits. The area for growing vegetable can also be doubled, *Qiang*

embroidery is a unique product of the *Qiang* people and has great market potential, but it is now just beginning to move towards market-oriented production.

3. Most of the non-farm activities, such as mining, logging, and processing, are limited by many factors such as lack of resource bases, technology, funds, and markets. Relatively speaking, the exploitation of water resources has better prospects. According to a tentative survey by the relevant departments, there are another four places along the rivers in this township that are suitable for the construction of small-scale water conservation projects for energy as well as irrigation.
4. From a long-term point of view, more emphasis should be placed on human resource development and the construction of infrastructural facilities. It will be difficult for non-farm employment in this township to take off without human resource development programmes and without the improvement of infrastructural facilities. The relevant government departments should therefore make efforts to improve the knowledge and skills of the local people, to create conditions to absorb qualified scientists and technicians, and to attract investments from outside.
5. Mining in Mianchi township is still on an informal level and there are no environmental safeguards. Further, survey of mineral resources (quartzite, barite, and mica) should be conducted with a view to formalising operations and extracting minerals without damaging the environment.
6. Efforts also need to be made to improve the traffic, road, and communications' infrastructure. The condition of the roads connecting the Chengdu-Aba road with villages such as Qiangfong and Keyue needs to be improved to facilitate the transportation of vegetables and fruits to the market.
7. A number of guidelines relating to policies can also be proposed as a result of the Mianchi case study.
  - i) **Need for a Stable Policy:** A stable policy is crucial to encourage farmers to grow fruit trees on their contracted hilly lands. Any change in the CRRP policy will have a serious impact on such activities.
  - ii) **Preferential Treatment:** Farmers willing to involve themselves in horticultural development and other activities based on natural comparative advantages should receive preferential treatment with respect to loans and extension support.
  - iii) **Training:** Occasional training and guidance in the techniques of fruit and vegetable cultivation are not enough to enter a competitive market in the future. The need for well-trained extension agents, specialising not only in production but also in quality control, grading, and packaging is, therefore, great. More emphasis needs to be placed on relating basic and professional education to the needs of horticultural and similar developments. Also, information regarding markets and appropriate opportunities needs to be disseminated through the formal channels of the village and township governments.
  - iv) **Attracting Outside Expertise:** A favourable policy needs to be pursued by local governments to attract outside expertise and entrepreneurs in the development of off-farm activities both within and outside agriculture.