

EMPLOYMENT IMPLICATIONS OF OFF-FARM ACTIVITIES FOR WOMEN AND LOW INCOME GROUPS

Women have a relatively lower participation rate in most of the off-farm activities outside agriculture. Among the total of 258 active persons engaged in off-farm activities outside agriculture in 1990, only 44 or 17.1 per cent of the total were women. There were no women engaged in transportation. Only 6.9 per cent of the total active population engaged in industrial activities were women. Nevertheless, the share of female workers in tertiary activities was 34 or 47.2 per cent of the total. Female participation in off-farm activities is affected mainly by two factors. The first factor is the labour intensity of the job. The second one is the mobility required in the job. Women's participation in non-farm activities is usually in a fixed place within the township.

Table 15 shows the division of labour by gender in various activities and is based on the information available from the household survey. About 50 per cent of the horticultural activities are carried out by females. In the growing of fruits and other cash trees, men spend more time in activities such as transplanting and pruning. Females spend more time on activities such as harvesting and marketing.

Females do much of the work related to pig and poultry-raising. According to estimates made by the households, about 40 per cent of the total time spent on pig and poultry raising is contributed by females and 10 per cent is contributed by males. The remaining 50 per cent is contributed by theoretical non-labourers. In tertiary activities and crop cultivation, labour by gender is almost even. Housework and embroidery are undertaken mostly by females. Odd jobs and craft-work are mostly undertaken by men.

In addition to their contribution to agriculture and related work, women also do most of the housework. According to the estimate from the surveyed households, about 80 per cent of the housework is performed by the female population. During our survey we often observed many men sitting chatting and drinking around a table, while women did the housework or tended animals. In most villages where the level of off-farm employment is not high, the group which has the most free time is that consisting of young males. Middle-aged females are the busiest group.

In general, the development of OFEAs has not only opened new areas in which women can display their ability, but has also enhanced their role in traditional agriculture. As more and more men undertake off-farm activities, the burden of traditional agriculture is falling on women. Almost all of the women surveyed believed that they played a greater role in agricultural activities.

The participation of low-income groups in off-farm activities is lower than that of female groups. The household survey indicated that, among the 30 households surveyed, all the households engaged in transportation and over 90 per cent of the households engaged in tertiary activities had at least middle-level incomes (between 200-500 Rmb). Four factors affected the poorer groups' participation in off-farm activities. The first factor was the investment capacity or funds to start a certain activity. Secondly, they undertook activities where the risks of failure were low. Thirdly, they engaged in activities that were popular in the locality. Low income households normally did not start an activity which had not been tried out by their neighbours. Fourthly, they engaged in activities for which they had the necessary skills or the determination to learn the skills.

Table 15: Division of Labour By Gender

Type of Job/Activity	Labour Contribution (in per cent)		
	Female (%)	Male (%)	Total (%)
Industries	6.9	93.1	100
Transport	0	100	100
Tertiary	47.2	52.8	100
Vegetable Cultivation	50	50	100
Fruit Cultivation	50	50	100
Pig and Poultry Raising	40	10	50*
Cattle and Sheep Rearing	13.3	26.7	40*
Out of Work	5	95	100
Craftsmen	5	95	100
<i>Qiang</i> Embroidery	75	0	75*
Crop Cultivation	50	50	100
Housework	40	10	50*

Source: Sample Household Survey

Note: In figures marked with an asterik, the remaining percentage is contributed by theoretical non-workers (i.e., females below 16 and above 55 and males below 16 and above 60).

Horticulture and livestock-raising were, therefore, two areas in which low income households were involved for obvious reasons. Firstly, these activities did not require a lot of funds to start with. Secondly, most of the households had some experience in these activities. Thirdly, these activities were also popular in the area.

A number of persons from the low income groups are engaged in sideline activities, basically in doing odd jobs. Odd-jobs need little investment. Also, most of the activities need little skill but strong physical strength.

Background of Persons Engaged in Off-farm Activities

Information from the sample survey reveals that individually-run enterprises are owned and operated by persons with relatively higher levels of education. Off-farm activities within agriculture were mostly taken up by persons with an educational attainment of less than junior high school level (Table 16).

Past employment experience and the ability for social interaction were also important factors in establishing individually-run enterprises.

Table 16: Educational Background of Off-farm Workers

Type of Jobs	No. of Persons	Education			
		Senior School	Junior School	Primary School	Illiterate
Township-run and Village-run enterprises	3	0	2	1	0
Individually-run enterprises	13	4	6	2	1
Off-farm Activities within Agriculture	68	3	14	26	25
Total	84	7	22	29	26

Source: Sample Household Survey

Note: At least three persons were engaged in two off-farm activities.