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The Risk of Impoverishment – The Social Impact of Involuntary Resettlement in Rural China

Bettina Gransow

Abstract

Poverty research in general – and research on poverty in China in particular – is dominated by studies dealing with poverty reduction, while the question of its origin (i.e. how it is produced in the first place) is widely factored out. Inspired by Else Oyen's alternative approach to understanding poverty, this paper aims at analysing involuntary resettlement induced by investment projects in rural China as an example of forces and processes *producing* poverty. After a short review of the concept and scope of involuntary resettlement caused by investment projects, the paper analyses the social impact of resettlement in rural China with a focus on loss of land and the risk of impoverishment. It is argued that the risk of impoverishment affects men and women in different ways and that gender-blind resettlement policies may create additional risks for female resettlers. The paper concludes that an analysis of poverty-production forces and processes would contribute to better-targeted resettlement policies as well as poverty-reduction policies. (Manuscript received January 30, 2007; accepted for publication March 1, 2007)

Keywords: poverty, rural China, resettlement (policy), relocation, dam construction projects, Three Gorges project, investment projects, social risk, gender issues

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Studie

Das Risiko der Verarmung – Soziale Wirkungen unfreiwilliger Umsiedlungen im ländlichen China

Bettina Gransow

Abstract

In der chinabezogenen Armutsforschung – ebenso wie in der Armutsforschung im Allgemeinen – dominieren Untersuchungen zur Armutsminderung, während die Frage der Entstehung bzw. der Produktion von Armut weitgehend ausgeklammert bleibt. Angeregt durch Else Oyens alternativen Ansatz zum Verständnis von Armut zielt der vorliegende Beitrag darauf ab, unfreiwillige Umsiedlungen, die durch Investmentprojekte hervorgerufen werden, als ein Beispiel für Armut produzierende Kräfte und Prozesse im ländlichen China zu untersuchen. Nach einem kurzen Überblick zum Konzept und Ausmaß unfreiwilliger Umsiedlungen behandelt der Beitrag deren soziale Wirkungen mit einem Fokus auf dem Verlust des Bodens und dem Risiko der Verarmung im ländlichen China. Es wird gezeigt, dass Verarmungsrisiken Männer und Frauen in unterschiedlicher Weise betreffen und dass eine mangelhafte Umsiedlungspolitik noch zusätzliche Risiken für die betroffene Bevölkerung hervorrufen kann. Der Beitrag kommt zu dem Ergebnis, dass eine größere Sozialverträglichkeit von Umsiedlungen wie auch eine stärker zielgerichtete Armutsbekämpfung in China eine Analyse der Prozesse und Kräfte, die Armut produzieren, zur Voraussetzung hat. (Manuskript eingereicht am 30.01.2007; zur Veröffentlichung angenommen am 01.03.2007)

Keywords: Armut, ländliches China, Umsiedlungspolitik, Umsiedlung, Dammbauprojekte, Dreischluchten-Projekt, Investmentprojekte, soziale Risiken, Geschlechterfragen

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Introduction: Understanding the Nature of Poverty Production

The master narrative of poverty reduction in China is normally told as a success story. Over the past quarter of a century, the estimated share of the Chinese population living below the poverty line has been reduced dramatically, lifting several hundred million people out of absolute poverty. The global implications of this development are tremendous: without China's contribution to poverty reduction, the world poverty figures based on income would not have seen a reduction by 393 million people (from 1981 to 2001), but would have turned into an absolute increase of 29 million (UNDP 2006).

After a period of decollectivisation and agricultural reforms in the first half of the 1980s, the Chinese government undertook targeted structural measures to combat rural poverty. A white paper on China's rural poverty reduction published in 2001 describes the stages and measures of China's anti-poverty programmes. At the beginning of the 21st century the Chinese government started a ten-year programme of rural poverty reduction (2001-2010) with a focus on areas containing ethnic minorities, former revolutionary bases, border regions and destitute parts of central and western regions (State Council 2001).

In this dominating narrative of poverty and poverty reduction in China, poverty is characterised by geographic remoteness and environmental fragility. Despite some research having been undertaken on the emergence of urban poverty (e.g. Wang 2004; Li Jun 2004; Li Yanchang 2004), absolute poverty in China is seen as a predominantly rural phenomenon. When in 2003 the number of the absolute poor in China was on the rise for the first time in 20 years (see Liu 2006:24, table 2), the Chinese government attributed this to natural disasters, conditioned by an external reality. In policy discourses, poverty is often described as "residual" poverty (Popkins 2005:87). This narrative nourishes the assumption that poverty in China will be eradicated on a step-by-step basis, hand in hand with economic growth and modernisation processes. This poverty narrative fits in well with the credo of the international donor community suggesting a pro-poor growth strategy, combining economic growth with specific pro-poor improvements (e.g. Ravallion/Chen 2004; BMZ 2006).

Yet a closer look at the composition of China's poverty population and vulnerable groups reveals a much more complex picture, including peasants without land, resettlers from dam areas and other development interventions, rural migrants, unemployed and laid-off workers, poor elderly people in rural

and urban areas, poor students in higher education, street children, etc. (Chen 2000; Zhang 2003).

With regard to poverty research in general and poverty research on China in particular, the necessity of making the nature of poverty-producing processes more visible needs to be noted. Like Else Oyen, who suggests an alternative approach to understanding poverty, it is argued here that

the time has come to focus research on poverty production and to better understand the forces that keep producing poverty in spite of the many poverty-reducing strategies that have been introduced. Likewise, it can be argued that unless new knowledge is acquired to stop these poverty-producing processes, or even better reverse them, there is little gain in introducing measures to counteract those forces. The process can be likened to the famous Lambeth Walk: one step forward and two steps back (Oyen 2004:305).

Also with regard to China, we find poverty research dominated by approaches dealing with poverty reduction (e.g. Li 1997; Zhang 2004; Li 2004). Inspired by Else Oyen's alternative approach to understanding poverty, this paper¹ aims at analysing involuntary resettlement induced by investment projects in rural China as an example of forces and processes producing poverty. After a short review of the concept and scope of involuntary resettlement caused by investment projects, the paper analyses the social impact of resettlement in rural China, thereby focusing on loss of land and the risk of impoverishment². It is argued that the risk of impoverishment affects men and women in different ways and that resettlement policies themselves may create additional risks for female resettlers. The paper concludes that an analysis of poverty-production forces and processes would contribute to better-targeted resettlement policies as well as poverty-reduction policies.

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented to the 8th European Conference on Agriculture and Rural Development in China (Panel on "Reassessing the nexus between migration and poverty") held in Yiwu, Zhejiang Province, PRC, 30 August-3 September 2006. I thank Heather Zhang, Flemming Christiansen, Rachel Murphy, Jennifer Holdaway and Pal Nyiri for their stimulating questions and comments. For a review of the conference see Alpermann/Gransow 2006. I also thank Susanna Price and two anonymous reviewers for valuable comments.

² A discussion of the interactions between the risk of impoverishment, resettlement and environmental degradation is not included here. For a discussion of environment and resettlement in the Three Gorges Project see Heggelund 2004.

Involuntary Resettlement: Concept and Scope

The concept of involuntary resettlement (*fei ziyuan yimin*) is complex and involves a host of perspectives: social, economic, political, cultural, religious, environmental and technical ones. People affected by land acquisition, house demolition and relocation are key stakeholders in investment projects. Involuntary resettlement is a specific form of resettlement compared to other forms of resettlement that may result from displacement, such as refugees fleeing natural calamities or military conflicts. It also differs from spontaneous or organised resettlement undertaken voluntarily by self-selecting resettlers to improve their socio-economic situation and reduce poverty. Forced resettlement caused by development interventions is termed “involuntary resettlement”. In China, different sectors use different concepts for involuntary resettlement. In the context of urban construction, for example, involuntary resettlement is termed “demolition” or “relocation of housing” (*bei chaiqian huo bei fangwu chaiqian anzhi de renkou*); in land management, systems and railways, roads, power and energy, it is called “land acquisition” or “land acquisition and house demolition” (*zhengdi he fangwu chaiqian renkou*); and in the case of water conservancy, it is termed “reservoir resettlement” (*shuiku yimin, shuili gongcheng yimin*). “Involuntary resettlement” as used here refers to all activities related to land acquisition for development purposes, demolition, relocation and reconstruction of socio-economic systems (ZGGZG 2004:82)³.

The broad concept of involuntary resettlement used in the Chinese context comes close to the World Bank’s own terminology:

Resettlement [...] covers all direct economic and social losses resulting from land taking and restriction of access, together with the consequent compensatory and remedial measures. Resettlement is not restricted to its usual meaning – physical relocation. Resettlement can, depending on the case, include a) acquisition of land and physical structures on the land, including businesses; b) physical relocation; and c) economic rehabilitation of displaced persons, to improve (or at least restore) income and living standards. [...] The term ‘displaced persons’ is synonymous with ‘project-affected persons’ and is not limited to those subjected to

³ English translations of the term *yimin* are sometimes confusing, because *yimin* is translated not only as “resettlement” but also as “migration” (see e.g. Zhou Daming 2006); some dictionaries indicate ‘migration’ as being the only proper translation of *yimin*.

physical displacement (World Bank 2004:5).

Since the late 1990s, China has been pursuing a policy of economic expansion with extensive investment in the country's infrastructure, particularly in the transport, energy, telecommunications and water supply sectors.⁴ New facilities are under construction, while networks for utilities such as transport, power and water are being extended and more evenly distributed (Lu 2000:71-6). This development strategy attaches special significance to a series of large-scale projects of enormous magnitudes and economic importance that make them objects of national prestige, but which entail technical, environmental and social risks that have exposed them to criticism. The best known of these is the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River. Additional large-scale projects include the Xiaolangdi hydro project on the Yellow River; the railway line from Golmud to Lhasa, which, like the Three Gorges Dam, is part of the Western Region Development Strategy⁵; a massive water supply project to pump water from the south of the country to the north where it is in short supply; and a high-speed railway line from Beijing to Shanghai (and Hangzhou).

At present, many infrastructural development projects are still seen as ends in themselves, with the social output of the project being an increase in the overall well-being of the people affected. This reflects the predominance of economic and engineering considerations in construction projects. However, the success of a project ought not to be measured merely by the completion of a dam or a road, for example. Rather it should be judged by the degree to which it maximises its potential to improve the livelihoods of people directly affected by the project. In the rapidly developing environment of the Chinese economy and society, and especially in the poor regions where the bulk of infrastructure projects will take place in the near future, it does not seem enough to call for the recovery and reconstruction of a living standard which is already below the international poverty line in some regions.

The environmental and social side effects of investment projects – those already manifest as well as those that may be planned in the future – are but the

⁴ This paragraph draws on Gransow 2003:30.

⁵ The Western Region Development Strategy started at the end of the 1990s and aims at accelerating the development of the western and central provinces of China, with priority being given to minority and border areas, including the objective of further poverty reduction and integration of minority needs in the design and implementation of this strategy.

tip of the iceberg of so-called “externalities of development”, that is, the external costs that have arisen and will continue to arise as a consequence of economic modernisation (cf. Zweig 2000:121; Gransow 2003:30). There are numerous projects in which farmland requisition and involuntary resettlement take place. Official estimates for the Three Gorges project alone call for involuntary resettlement of at least 1.13 million people (up until 2009).⁶ Resettlement can be characterised as a major crisis in the life of people directly affected by the project, with the possibility of them making a fortune out of the situation or – as is more often the case – of facing harsh challenges. Impoverishment has been recognised as the most widespread effect of involuntary resettlement (Cernea 2000). This is also true for the Chinese experience.

In recent years, *shangfang* and *xinfang* (visits and letters of complaint) – a unique channel in China for lodging complaints with higher authorities and seeking justice – have been on the rise. In a recent survey on this system of petitioning, problems resulting from land requisition were given as the second most frequent reason of complaint, outnumbered only by corruption as the most prominent reason for seeking redress of grievances (Yu 2004:215). This indicates that resettlement and its social effects, particularly on the poor and vulnerable groups, are urgent social matters⁷ that need to be addressed by central and local governments and other responsible stakeholders in investment projects and investment policies.

Since the People’s Republic of China was founded, around 45 million people have been resettled to make room for construction projects. As can be seen from table 1, these also include more than 12 million farmers moved for reservoir construction.

Since the 1990s the number of urban projects that necessitate land acquisition and involuntary resettlement has been on the rise, displacing densely settled urban populations (Shi et al. 2001:2) It may be assumed that the actual number of people affected by project-induced resettlement is even higher, with 22 million people being resettled between 1986 and 2006 to make way for dams and reservoirs (Guowuyuan 2006).

⁶ CTGPC, undated, p.25. Unofficial estimates suggest 2.5 million people are to be resettled (Wang 1997:351). 1.05 million people had already been relocated by 2005 (Xinhua News Agency 2005).

⁷ For a more detailed discussion of social unrest please refer to Schucher 2006.

Table 1 People affected by project-induced resettlement in the PRC (estimated number in millions)

Type	Year						
	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	total	%
Reservoirs	4.6	3.2	1.4	1.0	2.0	12.2	27
Transport	2.5	0.9	2.7	1.3	2.0	9.4	21
Urban	1.5	1.3	2.6	8.5	9.6	23.5	52
Total	8.6	5.4	6.7	10.8	13.6	45.1	100

Source: Shi et al. 2001:2.

Estimations of the number of peasants affected by land acquisition vary between 40 and 60 million. Some sources estimate the number of landless farmers (*shidi nongmin*) at 40 million. Other sources argue that between 1987 and 2001 alone, 35 million peasants lost all or part of their land and 23.9 million *mu* of land were acquired for non-agricultural purposes. Land acquisition not legally approved by the relevant authorities is not included in these figures (estimated at 20-30% in relation to the legal land transactions and sometimes estimated as high as 80% thereof). It has been argued that the number of landless farmers, including those who lost their land between 1987 and 2001 due to illegal forms of land acquisition, may come to between 51 and 55 million. If one also includes a certain percentage to account for the villagers who are not officially registered (because of birth-control policies and other reasons), then the number of landless farmers will be likely to increase to around 60 million. Given that 2.5 to 3 million *mu* of land are acquired each year and 3.57 to 4.29 million peasants lose their land as a result, then within ten years the number of landless farmers will easily reach 100 million (Liao 2005:98/99).

The Social Impact of Resettlement Processes

Investment projects that change patterns of the use of land, water and other natural resources can cause a range of resettlement effects and resettlement losses.⁸ Small plots of land required to construct local infrastructure such as schools, clinics, small pumping stations and pylons might create limited resettlement

⁸ This section is based on ZGGZG 2004, pp.85-92. An annotated English translation, ed. by B. Gransow and S. Price, is in preparation.

effects. Long alignments required for roads, railways and canals primarily cause resettlement effects along a narrow right of way. Such alignments might disrupt community networks dividing roads, paths, irrigation systems and landholdings. Reservoirs for water supply, irrigation or power generation can create wide-scale land acquisition and displacement of urban enterprises as well as communities. The construction of urban roads, bridges, the facilities of drainage and water supply, power and energy, and sewage reticulation may necessitate the demolition of residential housing, shops, enterprises and utilities such as those installed for power and water reticulation above and below ground. Most types of projects, in fact, have the potential to create resettlement effects (ZGGZG 2004:85).

Different kinds of resettlement strategies, such as relocating households nearby but further back from the acquired alignment, centralised relocation to a site outside the original settled area, and centralised or dispersed relocation into host communities may cause different kinds of social impact. Long-distance resettlement, rural to urban resettlement or resettlement of minority nationalities may cause problems of adaptation and integration in terms of differences in language, nutrition, culture and lifestyle between the place of origin and the new resettlement site.

Farmers who lose part or all of their land resources have to cope with multiple social consequences, including the loss of income-generating resources based on land and the loss of income-generating resources based on land in the future.⁹ With the loss of land, the original land-based labour, production and managing skills become invalid and new skills have to be acquired through training. In the case of resettlement nearby, and if the farmers are compensated on a land-for-land basis in their original community, then the original labour, production and managing skills may still be valid, so in this case the loss may be less significant. But in the case of long-distance resettlement, even if the displaced people can gain new land in the relocation area, the labour, production and managing skills formed under the original land and production conditions will be devalued and have to be regained through training. This is due to differences in the nature of

⁹ Some undeveloped resources such as waste mountains or hills, unused land, bodies of surface water, and mines may be occupied by the project. Although these resources might not currently be utilised, they are potential resources that could have been used in the future and could possibly have created economic and social value, employment opportunities and income for both the owners and the legal users (ZGGZG 2004, pp.85/86).

land, climate, the variety of agriculture products, cultivation methods, labour tools and marketing conditions (ZGGZG 2004:86).

Social networks play an important role during the resettlement process. During the process of housing reconstruction, relatives may help each other and will provide labour and other substantial support. However, on displacement, the displaced people leave the original community and are resettled elsewhere. Due to the long distances that often lie between the old and the new settlements, the original social network will inevitably be weakened and the intensity of ties will gradually be reduced and may even disappear altogether eventually. The relocated people will build new social networks, make new friends and associate with new colleagues and neighbours once they have settled down in the new community. From this point of view, the social network of displaced people may expand. The change of social networks will exert various effects on different people and different families. Generally speaking, the elderly, the poor and women tend to suffer, whereas the younger members, including the children, can more easily adapt to the new community and may consequently benefit more from it. This, in turn, may give rise to conflicts between the generations within a relocated household. Different patterns of resettlement may exert different effects on the social relationship network. Concentrated resettlement of integrated villages or groups may reduce the damage to social relationships that existed in the original community. At the same time, however, the newly built social network between relocated groups and the host community will be significantly weakened and will make social integration more difficult (ZGGZG 2004:86/87).

Land acquisition may impact on places of traditional cultural activities such as temples, churches, graveyards and other places that have a cultural value - such places may disappear due to land acquisition and relocation. Some cultural facilities may be reconstructable in other places. This not only raises the question of compensation for facilities that cannot be valued easily (McDonald 2002), but it also touches on rituals, belief systems, fears and norms of the people affected, especially in minority nationality areas.

After relocating to a different community, transport, culture, education, medical care, health, the living environment and commerce may all be improved because the community is planned and constructed according to new requirements and standards. However, in the case of resettlement to a nearby site, the external transport situation may not improve, and may even become worse because the

original transport system is disrupted or completely destroyed, with the result that the community has to depend on long-distance transportation or water carriage. In such cases, if most members of the original community leave for other places, public facilities such as schools and medical care clinics are removed in consequence. As a result, the conditions of education and medical care that the people remaining in the original community encounter may deteriorate (ZGGZG 2004:92).

The Calculated Risk – Impoverishment of Resettlers

Impoverishment, a consequence of project-induced farmland requisition and involuntary resettlement, is one of the most far-reaching social risks of project interventions. When local residents have to be resettled for an infrastructure project, those who can afford it endeavour to take the opportunity and combine their savings with the compensation money they receive in order to build a larger and better house. Sometimes the opportunity is taken to split the household and build two houses, one with the compensation money and the other with construction materials taken from the old house. If the new houses are located on what will become a shopping street or across from where a station will be built, additional economic benefits can be expected. Those people, however, who only had small dwellings and therefore only receive a small amount of compensation and who also do not have any significant savings are in no position to use resettlement measures to their benefit. In fact, they will probably have to borrow money to build their new house and will possibly run into debt.

It has been argued that a constant feature of China's earlier centrally planned construction of major dams and reservoirs was the government's repeated failure to consult the targeted populations (Jun 1997:74). In the case of the Sanmenxia reservoir, large groups of Han Chinese resettlers from Shaanxi province were sent to places in Ningxia province where the local people were predominantly Hui (Chinese-speaking Muslims). This happened during the Great Leap Forward, and in 1961 at the peak of a massive famine the resettlers began fleeing back to Shaanxi. By 1989, a third of the 300,000 Shaanxi resettlers had forced their way back. A second problem has always been the crucial question of adequate compensation. The hardship caused by low rates of compensation may give rise to long-term difficulties of recovery in the post-relocation period (Jun 1997:75, 81). Another lesson of earlier resettlement programmes in China is the risk of falling into poverty because resettlers were moved from productive farmland to smaller

and lower-quality land. The situation may worsen when households are moved twice or even more times. In 1989, China's leading agency for poverty relief acknowledged that roughly 70 per cent of the country's 10.2 million reservoir relocates were living in extreme poverty (Jun 1997:86-90). As the mid-term evaluation of the government's ten-year anti-poverty plan (2001-2010) shows, the risk of impoverishment is a serious, complex and long-lasting problem facing rural resettlers in the Three Gorges project, too (Liu 2006: 460-73; Heggelund 2006).

The key issue in involuntary resettlement is the potential damage or even disintegration of the economic and social systems. According to the impoverishment risk and reconstruction model (IRRM) developed by Michael Cernea, involuntary displacement may cause eight kinds of risk, which have economic and social dimensions. The identified risks are as follows: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, food insecurity, increased morbidity and mortality, loss of access to common property resources and social disarticulation. The model has a dual emphasis (i) on risks to be prevented or mitigated and (ii) on reconstruction measures to be implemented to address those risks. For feasibility studies and preparation the model performs two main functions. Firstly, it has a diagnostic and predictive function, viz. that of anticipating risks in the resettlement processes and assessing their nature and expected intensity. Secondly, it has a problem-resolution and planning function to guide the incorporation of measures to prevent or mitigate each identified risk¹⁰. The model can be criticised for neglecting a number of perspectives, including access to education, devaluation of qualifications as a consequence of resettlement, the loss of cultural goods and symbols, and the omission of gender-specific differences and consequences in resettlement processes. Yet it is sufficiently flexible to incorporate additional

¹⁰ I will not go into detail on the reconstruction measures suggested by Michael Cernea here, but just mention them briefly: land-based resettlement in case of landlessness, re-employment in case of joblessness, house construction in case of homelessness, social inclusion in case of marginalisation, improved health care in case of increased morbidity, adequate nutrition in case of food insecurity, restoration of community assets and services in case of loss of access to common property resources and networks and community rebuilding in case of social disarticulation (Cernea 2000:20). It should be mentioned that Christopher McDowell has tried to integrate Cernea's IRRM model with the approach of sustainable livelihood research (McDowell 2002). This provides a starting point for further elaboration and adjustment of a sustainable livelihood approach in research on Chinese resettlement processes.

risks (see Cernea 2000:53).

New forms of poverty may result from displacement, or the original poverty levels may deepen, in a process of resettlement-induced impoverishment. Inadequate resettlement planning, or accidents during resettlement, may impoverish families who were originally well-off, possibly forcing them to fall below the poverty line. There can be a multiplicity of reasons for this, as can be seen from table 2.

Table 2 Types of impoverishment arising from resettlement

Type of loss	Type of impoverishment
Decrease of farmland and other resources such as forest land, which significantly reduces the sources of income	Economic impoverishment caused by loss of income-generating resources (loss of common property resources for food, grazing, household uses or income generation; loss of forest products for household use, animal fodder, or sale; loss of food sources)
Loss of the original location, skills and markets may reduce or even terminate employment opportunities and income sources	Economic impoverishment caused by unemployment or underemployment (displaced people might not have appropriate work skills and experience for their place of resettlement)
Accidents and disasters (e.g. traffic accidents, diseases, injuries and deaths, the loss of important labour tools that may create income such as vehicles) may destroy the family's earning capacity	Since displaced people are more vulnerable to shocks, impoverishment may result from external shocks, accidents or disaster experienced during resettlement
In the process of reconstruction, the excessive investment in non-productive assets (e.g. houses) may cause long-term shortages of productive investment and reduce income	Impoverishment characterised by a shortage of productive funds and income

Source: ZGGZG 2004, p.88.

Poverty frequently arises from a combination of risks, vulnerability and social exclusion. Land acquisition and resettlement raise several risks, and it is important to recognise that poverty and vulnerability are dynamic concepts. All households who lose land, their homes or other assets suffer a certain degree of increased vulnerability. If resettlement does not work well for them, their economic and

social well-being is at substantial risk.

If households affected by resettlement use their savings to build new and better houses, this also can represent a social risk because the reserves intended for social security are now no longer available in the event of illness or other unforeseen events. Thus, their standard of living may rise while their quality of life (in terms of social security) declines. Their lives are now less secure (cf. Li 2000:246). Particular categories of households, such as those with elderly or disabled members, may be significantly more vulnerable. Nevertheless, these are examples of risks that the household undertakes of its own accord – in contrast to the resettlement situation as such, in which those affected have not made the decision themselves but rather had the new social dangers imposed upon them.

Gender-specific Risks in Resettlement Processes

As resettlement always indicates a period of crisis for the affected household, existing gender inequalities within the household (such as inequalities regarding access to education, income, the division of labour or decision-making processes) might be deepened. To give but a few examples¹¹:

It is likely that rural women will be more directly affected by land acquisition than men. Married women in agrarian areas are often particularly affected by the requisition of farmland because many farming families display a gender-specific division of labour, with the husbands tending to pursue non-agricultural activities and their wives working the fields. This is very different from the traditional way of life where ‘the men were working in the fields and the women were sitting at the loom’. Therefore, it is likely that women will be more directly affected by land acquisition than men (ZGGZG 2004:90).

With resettlement, rural women’s employment opportunities and income may decrease and thus reduce their economic and social status. The income gap between men and women widened in China during the 1990s, especially in rural areas.¹² Loss of land may require rural women to seek non-agricultural

¹¹ If no other source is given, the following examples are taken from interviews carried out in 2001/02 in Guizhou, Anhui and Shaanxi province with resettlers affected by railway and other investment projects.

¹² The income gap between male and female incomes in urban areas was 7.4 per cent higher in 1999 than in 1990. With an average annual income of 7,410 CNY in 1999, urban women earned only 70.1 per cent of what men earned in urban areas. In rural areas, the income gap between male and female incomes was 19.4 per cent higher in 1999 than in 1990. With an average income

employment which needs education, skills, information, social networks and mobility – resources that rural women lack more often than men. Large-scale expropriation of farmland can make it urgent to find paid employment, a change for which rural women in general are clearly less well-equipped than men, since they are often less educated, and married women – due to their productive and reproductive tasks – are less mobile. Transfer from traditional agricultural sectors to non-agricultural ones is much more difficult for women to achieve than for men, because women have less adaptability and diversity in their choices than men. This was the conclusion of a study undertaken on the impacts of the Three Gorges Dam project on female resettlers.

Due to their educational and skill levels and lack of relevant social networks, it is much harder for the retrenched resettlers, especially women, to seek suitable new non-agricultural jobs in an intensively competitive labour market, compared to other retrenched workers who are urban residents [...]. Female resettlers often face double discrimination in the labour market as both women and resettlers (Tan/Graeme/Potter 2005:725).

Resettlement may result in rural schoolgirls dropping out of school. The household might be relocated to a site too far away from schools so that it is difficult for children to attend. For reasons of costs or security, parents may decide to discontinue school attendance for their daughters (but not for their sons). Pooling all resources into the establishment of new houses in the event of involuntary resettlement may therefore result in household decisions being made that discriminate against schooling for girls. This was the experience of a resettled household in a water control project in the Huai river basin (Anhui and Henan province). Mrs. Z, a 68-year-old peasant from GG village, lives together with her husband (a retired worker receiving a pension of 600 CNY per month), her youngest son, her daughter-in-law and two granddaughters (both of whom completed their primary education) and a grandson (at primary school). Three of her children are working elsewhere and sometimes subsidise clothes or extra money for their elderly parents. Her family was moved and the government gave them 8,000 CNY as compensation for the loss of their house, which was demolished. The old house had three south-facing rooms and three wing rooms,

of 2,369 CNY in 1999, rural women earned 59.6 per cent of what men earned in rural areas (China Woman Net 2001).

including a cowshed and other outbuildings. Z's family spent 30,000 CNY on the allotted house plot that was given to them by the government, and by borrowing some money from their eldest and second son and their daughter, they built a house with six rooms and three wing rooms. This house is of much better quality than their previous one. Because GG village lies next to the river, the construction of the dyke took away more land than anticipated, and the original 10 *mu* of land owned by Z was reduced to the present 6 *mu*. The family generally has enough grain to eat and also grows a few vegetables, and gets some income from the selling of aquatic products in a nearby city. Their living standard is considered average in the town. The old man's pension is kept for repaying debts, paying for their grandson's education and his own medical expenses. But the family lacks the 120 CNY per school term that would be needed for each of the granddaughters to continue to go to school.

The patrilocal marriage system gives rise to a variety of risks for young women moving in or moving out of a resettlement area. Especially in the rural areas, women's planning of their own lives differs from men's planning because of a patrilocal marriage system. Thus men's life planning is characterised by continuity – it is the traditional ascribed role for men in Chinese society to guarantee the continuity of their family – whereas marriage for a woman means discontinuity, a change from the family where one has grown up to the family of the husband, and it means a spatial change, too. This may have far-reaching implications for their access to land and the different ways in which land acquisition impacts on men and women. The patrilocal marriage system, with the bride normally moving into her husband's household, gives rise to a variety of risks for young women moving in or moving out of a resettlement area. Moving *out* of a resettlement area may imply that young women will lose their entitlement to a resettler's status. Moving *into* the resettlement area may imply that they will not be granted resettler status in the first place (Tan/Graeme/Potter 2005:728-29). Gender-specific problems may also arise in the event of divorce or female migrants returning home.

Project-induced resettlements present greater risks for households headed by women. Under normal to favourable conditions, adequate compensation payments allow a house of equal or higher value to be constructed. And yet households headed by women are frequently among the poorest. Compensation for shabby housing is usually low, and these households are not able to draw upon the savings needed to build new houses. Moreover, they often lack the skills that could help in construction activities. It is much more difficult for

women-led households to activate the neighbourhood social networks that could support them with construction projects, since, as a result of patrilocal traditions, they generally do not come from the same village. For the same reason, it is difficult for these households to provide reciprocal services for projects such as building a house, as is customary among men long established in the area. In general, women-led households do not have the material or social capital at their disposal that would be needed to take advantage of resettlement situations.

Rural women may encounter more difficulties than men in adapting to long-distance resettlement. Because of existing gender inequalities in education, skills, mobility etc., it may be assumed that rural women may encounter more difficulties than men with regard to adapting to long-distance resettlement, which gives rise to additional challenges for the resettled household. More research is needed on long-distance resettlement in general and its gender-specific impact in particular.

Inadequate compensation may be particularly stressful for women who, in general, are responsible for feeding the family. If, in cases of land acquisition and involuntary resettlement, no or inadequate compensation is paid, or if compensation is handed out late, then the risk of impoverishment among the vulnerable affected households is considerably higher than otherwise. This is particularly stressful for women who, in general, are responsible for feeding the family. If the necessary food quantities cannot be procured, it is reasonable to assume that the affected women first reduce their own rations, and therefore are the first people in the family to go hungry.

On the other hand, resettlement may also create opportunities for gender equality and improvements in women's status in the resettled households. Women play an important role in organising family affairs during the transitional period of resettlement and that may serve to enhance their status within the family. The occasion of relocation may be used to disaggregate a household, so that a young married couple will no longer have to live under the roof of the husband's parents, for instance. Affected by the tradition of the Chinese society whereby 'men are responsible for external affairs and women are responsible for internal affairs', women may play a special role in house reconstruction and livelihood rehabilitation and thus may enjoy greater decision-making power over the household livelihood development plans. As a result, women's status may be raised. If, for example, resettled households need to borrow money from relatives and friends, they would normally first turn to the male networks within the community. They can help each other with their labour in reconstructing

their houses, but each household affected will probably need all of its own savings. Because of the patrilocal marriage system, most male relatives live in the same village. All of them may be faced with the problems of displacement, reconstruction of housing and shortage of funds. The married women, however, normally come from families living in other places. Therefore, in this critical situation the married women often borrow money from their brothers and sisters and other relatives from their own families. This not only increases the degree of contact with the social network of the wife's family, but may also strengthen the position of the wife in her husband's household (Lin 1996:182).

Resettlement Policies and Practices

Since the establishment of the PRC, the vast majority of involuntarily resettled people have been displaced by construction of reservoirs, roads and railways in rural areas. At the same time, urban reconstruction, expansion and infrastructure development have led to significant involuntary resettlement in urban areas and city suburbs. In 1952, China introduced its first resettlement regulations, which required compensation for land expropriation for state construction projects (Heggelund 2004:62).¹³ However, resettlement before the 1980s is regarded as quite unsuccessful because the main focus was on the construction projects and not on restoring the livelihood of those people negatively affected by the projects (*zhong gongcheng, qing anzhi*). The reform policy introduced by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s also influenced resettlement policy and a greater focus was put on laws and regulations. In reservoir resettlement, an important regulation in 1981 required hydroelectric power stations to allocate 0.001 CNY per kWh for a reservoir maintenance fund to restore living conditions and improve infrastructure in reservoir resettlement areas. These regulations required project design and resettlement planning to take place at the same time. Under the Chinese legal framework, local governments are responsible for resettlement planning and budgets (Heggelund 2004:63-4).

Today, China's legal framework and procedures for involuntary resettlement are set down in the *Constitution* (adopted in 1982, revised in 1999); the *Land Administration Law* (1986, revised in 1998) together with the rules for its implementation formulated by the provincial governments; the *Regulations on*

¹³ In 1952 the land was still the private property of the peasants.

the Protection of Basic Farmland (adopted in 1998); *Regulations Governing Urban House Demolition and Relocation* (adopted in 1991, revised in 2001); *Regulations on the Compensation for Land Acquisition and Resettlement of the Construction of Large and Medium-sized Water Conservancy and Hydroelectric Projects* (adopted in 1991); and *Regulations on Resettlement for the Construction of the Three Gorges Project on the Yangtze River* (adopted in 1993, revised in 2001) (ZGGZG 2004:83; see also Yang/Yao 1998:6/7); and the *State Council's Subsidy Policies for Resettlers of Large and Medium-sized Reservoir Projects in the Post-relocation Period* (released on 14 August 2006) (Guowuyuan 2006). Chinese law enshrines the principle of minimum land acquisition and proper re-establishment of affected populations. For reservoir resettlement, development-orientated resettlement is encouraged with compensation at the first stage and production support at the second stage.

The guiding principle of development-based involuntary resettlement (*kaifaxing yimin fangzhen*) was proposed in the early 1980s. Unlike the compensation-based resettlement policy that was employed before, development-based resettlement, while stressing rural resettlement and relocation on the basis of land, also attaches great importance to proper rehabilitation of rural resettlers through the integrated development of agriculture, forestry and fruit production, animal husbandry, industry and side-line production in the resettled areas; through reconstruction of infrastructure such as water conservancy, electricity, the transport network, health, education and commercial facilities; as well as through provision of technical training especially targeting rural resettlers. Under the concept of development-based involuntary resettlement, the key to success is seen in providing viable economic development opportunities for the resettlers so that they can enhance their social and economic status. This strategy has externalised all or most of the social costs of resettlement caused by investment projects. It has neglected the information, consultation and participation of people affected by projects as primary stakeholders and has thus failed to be responsive to the needs of people negatively affected by projects. Compensation payments for resettlement that were too low or were delayed have contributed to the impoverishment of millions of rural resettlers in China.

In urban areas, land normally belongs to the state, while in rural areas it belongs to collectives (village committees or sub-village groups). In case land is needed by a development project for construction purposes, according to the legal procedures, the tenure of state-owned land has to be transferred and

collective land has to be expropriated by the state first. Only then can the land use right be transferred to the work unit using the land for construction. According to the Land Administration Law, land acquisition has to be approved by the State Council if more than 35 hectares of cultivated land or 70 hectares of uncultivated land are required. As regards smaller amounts of land, the land acquisition is approved by the governments (or cities) at the provincial level. Local governments below the provincial level have no authority to acquire any land for construction. The state protects cultivated land and strictly controls the conversion of cultivated land to non-cultivated land. If possible, wasteland and land of inferior quality should be acquired instead of cultivated land and land of superior quality (ZGGZG 2004:84).

Investment projects must bear all of the costs of the land acquisition, compensation and resettlement for the people utilising the land. The 1998 Land Administration Law (revised 2004) specifies that the cost of acquisition of cultivated land shall include four kinds of compensation: compensation for land; resettlement subsidies; compensation for attachments; and compensation for young crops on the land. The standard for setting the land compensation and the resettlement subsidy is also given in the national Land Administration Law. Nowadays, affected households may receive cash compensation and find alternative jobs by themselves instead of following the earlier practice of obtaining replacement farmland by redistributing the land remaining in the village after land acquisition. This is because, overall, the village generally wants to keep the 30-year land contracts unchanged (ZGGZG 2004:84).

A State Council Circular on Land Administration (Document 28) issued in October 2004 states that enforcing the strictest land administration system possible is essential for ensuring sustainable economic and social development through protection of the land resources, especially in view of the nation's diminishing land resources and large population (NDRC 2004). On land acquisition, compensation and resettlement, the document confirms that those people losing land have the right to maintain their land ownership and land use rights. The document confirms and extends the earlier 1998 Land Administration Law provisions designed to ensure the following safeguard for those losing land. Where farmers lose land in urbanising areas within city boundaries, they should be included in the city's urban employment and social security provisions. Outside city boundaries, the local governments must provide replacement farmland for farmers losing collective land or else provide them with replacement jobs. Labour

and social security departments and other relevant departments must provide assistance in employment, training and social security for those losing land. The land compensation must be distributed according to the principle that it is used primarily for those households whose land is taken (NDRC 2004).

These newer developments indicate a paradigmatic shift in China's resettlement policies from economic priorities to a more sustainability oriented approach. They show a clear trend away from development-orientated resettlement to the more equally distributed social, economic and environmental priorities of resettlement policies aiming at sustainable livelihood outcomes of people involuntary resettled by investment projects. More importance is attached to the social inclusion and participation of people affected by projects. Yet the relevant documents do not normally address the diverse effects of resettlement on different social groups such as men and women, the elderly, children, the poor, disabled people or minority nationalities and the different needs of all these groups regarding resettlement. According to a survey undertaken in 2004 among peasants in the Jiangning district of Nanjing City, different types of resettlement¹⁴ turned out to have different impacts on different demographic groups such as the elderly, youngsters, and middle-aged men and women. The findings of this survey suggest that non-agricultural resettlement may be more suitable for children and young people who are very flexible and are in need of opportunities for development. Non-agricultural resettlement would provide them with better educational options. For the elderly, however, non-agricultural resettlement has more negative effects as a result of the disruption of their social networks and the risk of impoverishment when they are rejected by employers because of their age and health. Compensation payments in form of retirement pensions would therefore be worth considering (Chen/Zhang 2006:267, 270).

Women may be exposed to a greater risk of impoverishment through resettlement, often because resettlement planners neglect their views, preferences, patterns of asset ownership and use, and their activities in production and in household and community maintenance. As they are more often tied to the home and farm by agricultural work and household responsibilities, women have fewer chances to transfer to non-agricultural employment. Experience shows that projects that pay no attention to gender matters tend to further exacerbate

¹⁴ Typical modes of resettlement are land resettlement, non-agricultural resettlement and resettlement compensation through retirement pensions (Chen/Zhang 2006:267)

existing gender-specific inequalities with regard to the social division of labour, access to resources and decision-making powers. Good resettlement planning ensures the participation of women.

Conclusion: Including Poverty Analysis in Resettlement Policies

As can be seen from the history of dam construction in the PRC, involuntary resettlement in the countryside has caused hardship as a result of low amounts of cash compensation, delayed payment of compensation and lower-quality land compensation, and frequently the long-term difficulties of recovery in the post-relocation period of resettlement have been underestimated. At the end of the 1980s, the majority of China's reservoir relocates were living in extreme poverty. Today, legal (and illegal) land acquisition is proceeding on a high scale. The estimated number of peasants without land (*shidi nongmin*) has already reached 60 million and may easily reach 100 million within the next ten years. Given the pressure on the labour market and the discontentment of resettlers manifested in a large number of petitions to various institutions and levels of government, this is not a *quantité négligeable*, but a considerable source of social unrest in the Chinese population.

Investment projects that give rise to large-scale involuntary resettlement may aptly be described as poverty-producing processes. Designed to contribute to an accelerated speed of economic development, investment projects are at the same time contributing to accelerated forms of social polarisation and the impoverishment of people affected by forced relocation. The effects differ according to the method of resettlement, the amount and time of release of compensation funds, the quality of resettlement management and the capacity of the affected households and individuals to deal with the resettlement situation. Those facing the highest risk of impoverishment are peasants who suddenly lose their land, but are not prepared to make a living from non-agricultural employment because of their age, health, level of education, etc. Different demographic and social groups of resettlers, men and women, might be affected by the risk of impoverishment in different ways. Existing gender gaps in terms of division of labour, education, income or participation in decision-making processes are likely to be widening during resettlement, which is a period of crisis for many affected rural households. Project-induced resettlement may not only endanger the poor in the project area, but may also impoverish families who were well-off before relocation.

The Chinese government has reacted to this situation with a couple of regulations that fit in nicely with the broader strategic shift in development thinking since 2003. The new regulations on compensation and resettlement for peasants whose land is acquired to build large and medium-sized water control and hydro power projects (Guowuyuan 2006) acknowledge and react to the fact that the risk of impoverishment is not only a short-term shock, but also has a long-term impact on those who are relocated due to construction projects. The regulations indicate a paradigmatic shift in resettlement policies from so-called development-based resettlement with its purely economic priorities to a sustainability-orientated resettlement policy indicating responsibility for the livelihoods of project-affected people. The thing is, the regulations are limited to water control and hydro power projects. They do not cover people affected by resettlement induced by investment projects in other sectors. Similar regulations would be needed for involuntary resettlement in transport projects, natural management projects or environmental improvement projects, etc.

Official development planning and investment approval procedures are increasingly recognising the fact that rapid economic growth can generate significant social (and environmental) issues. Including the prevention of poverty-producing processes into the overall project objectives of investment projects and integrating poverty analysis into the design and the budget of the projects could be seen as an important step to design better-targeted resettlement policies as well as better-targeted poverty-reduction policies.

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