

The Differences in Women's Development and Employment of Xiao Shaba Village

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Policy Pointers

Introduce more knowledge and production skills by providing women with more training opportunities to go outside the village for learning

Set up microfinance programs or development funds targeted at women's development

Develop strategic communication for better gender sensitive awareness and coordination between governmental institutions

Carry out programs aimed at reducing the size of the poor population and create targeted poverty alleviation at the household level



Liuku town, surrounded by high mountains and deep gorges (Credit: Zhong Mei)

Gender-related issues figure high on global research and policy agendas, especially economic issues such as employment and development inequity between men and women. This research has identified gaps in employment opportunities between men and women and has also identified the related causes of gender inequity in terms of their employment opportunities. The results of this research culminate to contribute to raising awareness of the affected people in the reservoir resettlement area, particularly focusing on the role of women. The research emphasizes the changes in employment circumstances and prospects after resettlement, and compares the income of people before and after the transition.

This study also provides an understanding of the changes in income structure and comparisons between men and women, including their life situations before and after resettlement, differences in employment opportunities, and the changes in the social divisions of labor. The aims of this research are to show that gender inequality is a pressing concern in resettlement areas such as the one studied and in the context of the women specifically, policy constraints and societal norms are present, resulting in the fact that the gender inequality in employment needs to be urgently and effectively addressed.

The focus of this research was on a resettlement area in a village called Xiao Shaba, that has been built in preparation for the reservoir caused by the planned Liuku hydropower project in Liuku Town, Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture of Yunnan province. The research aimed to analyze the employment differences between men and women in Xiao Shaba. Liuku Town hosts the seat of Nujiang Prefecture's government, and is located across from the Gaoligong Mountains, east of Myanmar, south of Lu Zhang Town, and north of Shangjiang Township. The town is surrounded by high mountains, deep valleys and ravines, as well as a natural ecosystem that is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

A number of factors affect employment and resettlement in the reservoir area including national policy, men's and women's education situation, and marital status. There is an overall lack of employment opportunities in this region, which affects the resettled communities. It is increasingly important to solve the issue of hydropower resettlement so that people resettled by the dam are not adversely affected – or can even benefit – from this type of development. Through this investigation, the misconception of rising inequality between men and women due to increased national policy on the matter has been uncovered. Unfortunately, this is a misconception that has been adopted by many policy makers. Policy makers have also neglected to consider their impacts on other groups outside of the standard gender debate, further adding to inadequate policy standards. Policy makers and implementers have weakened the gender gap in the process of resettlement as well as in the development of policies focused on gender, which results in rural women becoming even more marginalized.



Liuku town, surrounded by high mountains and deep gorges (Credit: Zhong Mei)

At present, gender equity is a serious concern in terms of employment disparities between men and women in the new resettlement areas. The issue of gender inequity in employment sectors can be addressed by state employment and policies as well as education and skills development. The development and expansion of local economies also has a positive impact on the overall employment situation. In the resettlement areas, given the lack of available agricultural land, the number of people engaged in farming would remain the same as before, while non-agriculture based employment has increased.



The "Big Valley" of the Nu River basin (Credit: Zhong Mei)

Solving the issue of gender equity in women's employment

The status quo of the gender division of labor and decision-making in the family needs to be rethought so that women can have access to more knowledge and production skills. Newer skills can enhance opportunities for women and create chances for their wider participation outside of their traditional communities as well as improve the status and rights of women in family and larger society. If women are provided more training opportunities and can go outside of their villages to further their learning, this will help expand their social and information networks and provide them an equal chance of finding employment. Providing specific projects for women's development such as microfinance or women's development funds can also assist women who are lacking start-up capital and help them to set up their own businesses, both at home and outside. Lastly, the state and the village communities need to work together to develop plans, projects and policies that can improve gender sensitivity and gender awareness among governmental institutions to improve gender equity in the resettlement areas.

Policy Recommendations

1. Introduce more knowledge and production skills:

Aiming at unsettling the status quo of the gendered division of labor and decision-making in the family division with the aim to enhance women's project activities, create a wider and more diverse participation for women in order to improve the status and rights for women in family and society.

2. Provide women with more training opportunities to go outside the village for learning:

In Liuku town, many women still stay at home and conduct housework, keeping their social circles within the community very small, similar in nature to the other people near them, but men receive the priority to earn the money for the family. Therefore, providing more training opportunities for women would expand women's employable skills in order to provide more opportunities to achieve sustainable development.

3. Set up microfinance programs or development funds targeted at women's development:

When women get married and live with their husbands, they will have less social capital and resources due to the social division of labor. In most cases, the social capital of a married woman is incorporated into her husband, that is, the common property. With the difference of the division labor, women's social capital will change. The development of women's microfinance programs or women's development funds can help women achieve self-development and self-employment. If this is the case, women's freedom of choice will increase.

4. Develop strategic communication for better gender sensitive awareness and coordination between governmental institutions:

Due to the fact that the role of women in society is considered less than a man's position in the family, the issue of female employment often receives less attention, leading to a disparate level of employment for men. If government departments such as the Women's Federation and Civil Affairs Office would be able to have a better general understanding of the female employment rate, it will be beneficial to take certain measures to improve women's income as well as their status and rights.

5. Carry out programs aimed at reducing the size of the poor population:

While local communities are generally always aware of threats to daily livelihoods, how can current government policies and programs match the attention and needs of basic living? Poverty is high in mountain areas, due to the limitation of the geographical environment and natural resources and transportation infrastructure constraints, which makes it ill-suited place for traditional development, such as farming and planting. These programs should focus on the important role that public property plays in anti-poverty efforts, through its function of resource reallocation, aiming at promoting social welfare.

6. Create targeted poverty alleviation at the household level:

On an operational level, through promoting the whole Xiao Shaba New-village, creating targeted poverty alleviation at the household level, the government departments need to integrate supporting funds to concentrate and address the problem of poor infrastructure and public service lags in the poor mountainous area like the old Xiao Shaba village. If this is done, costs of living can be reduced, and then increases employment opportunities can be made.

7. Provide more education opportunities:

Since most of the local women do not currently attach much importance to education, the result is overall poor education levels. The promotion of special policies such as full, free education, a guarantee for school-age girls to enter the education system, and a decrease in the overall cost of schooling will improve the general education situation and allow for more poor families to receive a formal education. A special, provincial fund to promote women's entrepreneurship and employment skills training should also be set up. The training type and courses should adapt to the role of local women and the characteristics of this demand

8. According to the local resources advantage, investors need to invest in:

- ❑ Handicraft workshops: As rural female labor force is currently in surplus, women handiworks have an advantage. The investors can help establish small workshops to produce handicrafts, while all those handicrafts are sold by the merchants.
- ❑ Investing in tourism services: There is currently a great deal of pristine natural environment and beautiful scenery in Liuku and the Nujiang basin. The government can invest in the rural tourism service industry to provide greater livelihood options to the local communities.
- ❑ Agricultural products processing: There is currently a large production of local agricultural products such as walnuts, so workshops or factories can be established to process such products, resulting in the production of walnut fruit and walnut powder, etc. This will drive the full utilization of local labor and increase employment opportunities.¹

¹ For more information on the subjects discussed in this brief, please visit the *Mekong, Salween and Red Rivers: Sharing Knowledge and Perspectives Across Borders* international conference proceedings at <http://bit.ly/2yKDz1f>.

Knowledge Products

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