



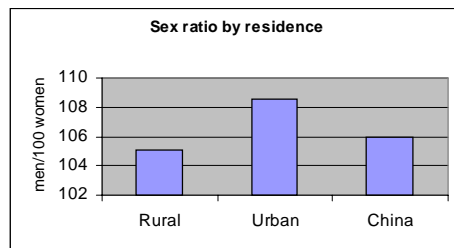
## KEY FACTS

- China's population is 48.5% female and 51.5% male
- Women aged 25 years and over, illiterates and semi-illiterates constitute 32% whereas the corresponding proportion for men is 13%
- Women represent 45% of all employed people
- Women account for 41.2% of the rural labour force in agriculture and rural enterprises
- Women's role in relation to men varies depending on the agricultural production system and the agro-ecological conditions
- Women have extensive work loads with dual responsibility for farm and household production
- Women's work is getting harder and more time-consuming due to ecological degradation, male out-migration and the shift to the household responsibility system
- Women have an active role and extensive involvement in livestock production, forest and water resource use but their input needs are poorly addressed
- Women contribute considerably to household income through farm and non-farm activities
- Women's work as family labour is underestimated

## GENERAL PROFILE

### Population

China's population at the end of 1996 was estimated at 1.22 billion with 27.7% below 15 years of age (1990 census). The urban population accounts for 26.2% (EIU, 1998). The population growth rate in 1990-95 was 1.11%, the total fertility rate in 1990-95 1.95%. Women constitute 48.5% of the total population (ESCAP, 1997). China's population is dominated by ethnic Han who made up 91.9% of the total population. Ethnic minorities are Zhuang, Tibetan, Mongols and others (EIU, 1998).



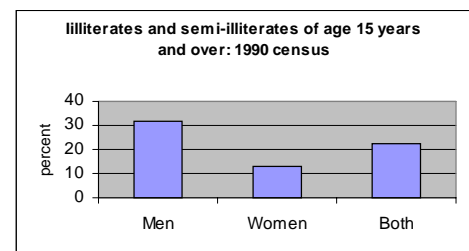
Source: ESCAP, 1997

The sex ratio in China is 106 men per 100 women. The excess of men in the population is attributed to female infanticide, higher female mortality rates and male-favouring birth rates. The bias against female infants is particularly marked in specific provinces (UNDP 1998). The predominance of men in the total population is more significant in urban than in rural areas. This higher masculinity in urban areas could be attributed to higher proportions of male migration from rural to urban areas. Additionally, young educated women also migrate in search of economic gains. Elderly and women who are likely to be left behind in the villages to undertake the agriculture tasks formerly the responsibility of the entire household (Croll, 1996).

### Education

The illiterates and semi-illiterates account for 22.2% of the population aged 15 years

and over. Of all women aged 15 years and over, illiterates and semi-illiterates constitute about 32% compared to 13% for men (ESCAP, 1997).



Source: ESCAP, 1997

### Labour

It was only after the foundation of People's Republic in 1949, that women began to appear in paid employment outside their homes. In 1990 the proportion of employed women in the total number of women aged 15 years and over was 73% and women accounted for 45% of the total of employed people. The vast majority of women and men were employed in agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry and fishing. However, the proportion of employed women in this sector was significantly higher (76.1%) than that of men (69.1%). Moreover, increasing numbers of women also work in rural non-agricultural enterprises. By the end of 1992, such enterprises were estimated to have employed more than 100 million people, of whom more than 40 million were women, largely engaged in food, clothing, knitting, toy-making, electronics, traditional handicrafts and service industries (ESCAP, 1997). In the countryside, the female labour force numbered 209.5 million, constituting 46.6 percent of the total labour force (UNDP, 1997). With the growing participation of women in the labour force, most of them work in the informal sector. They are engaged in the occupation characterised by low skills, low productivity, low wage and hence low status (ESCAP, 1997).

The **Human Development Index (HDI)** rank of China in 1997 was 93<sup>rd</sup> out of 146

countries, indicating medium life expectancy at birth, medium educational attainment and medium income. The **Gender-Related Development Index (GDI)** rank of China in the same year was 90<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries. This illustrates that China performs better in gender equality than on average achievements alone.

## AGRICULTURE

With rapid industrialization, the manufacturing sector contributes 51.7% to the Gross Domestic Product and agriculture only 21.2% (in 1993) (ESCAP, 1997), agriculture still playing the founding role in China's economy. 76.17% of the population are involved in agricultural enterprises and the remaining 23.83% in non-agricultural enterprises. 73.8% of the total area under cultivation is defined as rainfed and 26.2% as irrigated (FAO, 1997).

The role played by women in agriculture varies across the regions as well as with social classes. While women held a crucial place in certain rice producing areas of the South, it was exceptional for women to perform farm work in some Northern villages. Women performed about 16% of the farm work in the rice growing areas as against 9% in the wheat growing regions. Generally speaking, women worked more on the farm than men in sparsely populated regions, practising shifting cultivation. But men did much more farm work than women in densely populated regions practising plough cultivation. In the regions of intensive cultivation of irrigated land, both women and men had to work hard in order to support their families from a small plot of land. Further, while women did more farm work in the south than in the north, their role in agricultural production was relatively minor in almost all localities. By and large, women's farm work was highly seasonal and also limited to such chores as harvesting and weeding. With the exception of few places in the south, concept also remained the ideal that women should not engage in agricultural work (ESCAP, 1997).

With the economic reform and the open-door policy, a household respon-

sibility system in agricultural production was introduced. The development of a market economy led the male labourers to go outside for non-farm employment. Though they come back in the busy agricultural season, most of the agricultural activities are now handled by women, the older villagers and children. Women shoulder the responsibility of rearing children, caring for husbands, attending aged parents and grandparents, and meanwhile do most of the household work such as preparing forage, collecting manure, raising poultry and livestock, etc. Rural labour force statistics for 1991 show that women accounted for 41.2% of the rural labour force in agriculture and rural enterprises and 22.96% in agricultural services (UNDP/FAO, n.d.). In Hongpo Administrative Village, women undertake more than 60% of the agricultural activities (Zhonghua, 1998). In Yunnan Province women provide 46.6% of the labourers in the countryside (Pikun and Chuan, 1998). After the introduction of the family contract system, women accounted for 60-70% of the total manpower in farm work (Qi-Zhi, 1997). Women in the north-western region of China provide 70% of the total manual labour force in agriculture. Home garden production is the exclusive responsibility of Chinese women almost everywhere (UNDP/FAO, 1998).

Prior to the economic reform in 1978, land in China could not be privately owned, bought, sold, inherited or bequeathed. But under the new household responsibility system, lands were allocated to the individual households, but land ownership rights still cannot be sold or purchased, only the privilege of usufruct could be transacted. While allocating land, land titles were issued in the name of men, though women do the agricultural work.

### Crop production

China is one of the earliest and most important cradles of plant cultivation the world. Grain (wheat, maize and rice), cotton, oil-bearing crops, sugar-bearing crops, tobacco and tea are the major farm products in the country (MOA, 1989). Fruit (tropical, subtropical and temperate) cultivation occupies the third place after grain and

vegetables in terms of acreage. Many deciduous fruits (like peach, Asian pear, apricot, plum, etc.) are native to China. The government has a policy of encouraging deciduous fruits in the hills and mountains leaving the fertile lowlands for grain and other annual crops (FAO, 1998). Rural women are active workers both in rice farming and horticulture crop systems as well as in subsistence production.

Since the revolution, the gender division of labour underwent changes and rural women began to work both inside and outside the household. Although women spend a great deal of time and energy on agriculture, they still play a supportive role. Men still take charge of production. It is men who decide what to grow, how much to grow and where to sell. Although they do farming in addition to their jobs in town, they have the final say. They come back to do spring ploughing, summer and fall harvesting (Xiaoxian, 1994). But there are villages where women also do the ploughing (Kelkar and Yunxian, 1997).

An example of gender involvement in wheat production in South-Ershilipu village in north-west China is presented below

Activities	W	M	B
Ploughing	X	XX	
Planting crops	X	XX	
Weeding	XX	X	
Fertilising crops	XX	X	
Spraying	X	XX	
Harvesting			X
Post-harvest processing	XX	X	
Storage	XX	X	

M: Men; W: Women; B: Both; XX/X:  
Relative involvement  
Source: UNDP/FAO, 1998

### Livestock

In China livestock production has become an important component of the farming system. Rearing pigs and chicken is now common in farm households. These animals provide protein to the farm households. Organic manure from pigs is very important for fertilization. Pigs also provide animal oil and thus guarantee cash income to farm families.

Women are extensively involved in livestock rearing both by tradition and by the current need to improve income

through sideline activities. Rural labour force statistics for 1991 show that women accounted for 33.67% of the rural labour force in animal husbandry (UNDP/FAO, n.d.). Women collect fodder, feed, and clean sheds for these animals. They play a crucial role in providing farmyard manure as a by-product of livestock management. Women are the ones to worry about animals' health.

### Forestry

In China, forest and woodland account for 13.5% of the total land area (UNDP, 1997). Rural people depend heavily on forests. In China, fuelwood contributes to 80% to household energy supplies (UNDP, 1997). Firewood is a very important source of energy particularly for the minority populations who mostly live in remote and mountainous regions. However, rapid population growth is causing forest destruction in China.

Rural labour force statistics for 1991 show that women accounted for 32.2% of the rural labour force in forestry (UNDP/FAO, n.d.). Firewood collection is primarily done by women. In some cases men do cutting, but carrying is done by women (Zhonghua, 1998). Nonetheless, gender roles in fuelwood collection in the Zhongdian Tibetan community is different from many other places in Yunnan. Tibetan customs do not allow women to do heavy work and wood here is very hard, requiring axes and oil saws to cut it. Therefore, fuelwood is generally provided by the male member of the family. Every winter men go to the mountain to collect fuelwood for the next year. Women collect light fire fuel such as tree branches, pine needles, etc. (Zhongyun, 1998).

### Fisheries

China has a long-standing history of fisheries and the country contributes 25% to the total fish production in the world. China has both marine and inland fisheries ((MOA, 1996). Fisheries development has created numerous new jobs in fisheries processing and transportation. Chinese women are actively involved in fisheries. Rural labour force statistics for 1991 show that women accounted for 26.63% of the rural labour force in fisheries (UNDP/FAO, n.d.).

## ENVIRONMENT

Forest degradation has brought hardship to rural life, particularly to the women's life. Women have to spend more time and energy in firewood collection. In minority areas firewood collection has become a big burden to women. For example, every household in Nu'jiang Prefecture has to spend 150-200 labour days in firewood collection. In Luo'he Yi Nationality Township of Yixi Xian, firewood is collected from 10 kilometer's distance. In La'shi Township of Li'jiang county, Naxi nationality women leave early in the morning and come back late in the evening. Some farmers in Yunnan spend more than 3 months in collecting firewood (Zhonghua, 1998)

While women are being affected by the deterioration of forests, their role in forest conservation is increasing. For example, in Yiao'an county in Yunnan province, most of the labourers in the construction of Yangtse shelter-forests are women, due to the high male migration from the village (Pikun and Chuan, 1998). Moreover, women also know environmental conservation measures. In Luo'he Township of Yixi Xian, people have adopted regulatory measures of tending, thinning and pruning shrubs only at places 10 km. from the villages. Many approaches suggested by women are adopted to reduce firewood consumption (Zhonghua, 1998). Mosou women in Luoshui national village bring straw of maize and sunflower from the fields to replace firewood at their home. When they have free time, women often collect animal manure to put into their methane pond to produce bio-gas energy (Xuezhong, 1998).

In the north-western region, water is a scarce resource. Crop irrigation and domestic water needs increasingly demand proper water management practices. Women along with men are adopting water harvest and conservation practices. In other regions, annual floods are threat to the rural economy. In rural households both men and women will have to manage production work often under adverse weather conditions. Soil fertility management is crucial for agriculture productivity. Women play a crucial role in provid-

ing farmyard manure as a by-product of livestock management. Women are being progressively included in training in integrated pest management and greenhouse vegetable production.

## RURAL PRODUCTION

In many Chinese traditional households, women were engaged in making bean curd and fermented alcoholic drinks, preparing tobacco leaves for smoking, stitching clothes, etc. In certain agro-production systems that favour horticulture women play a key role in harvesting and packing high-value horticultural crops such as apples, pears and peaches. Though to a lesser extent, rural women were involved in such subsidiary occupations as tea processing, spinning, weaving, basket making and other handicrafts. However, women's involvement in these occupations varied from one region to another depending upon the amount of time devoted to farm activities. In the wheat-millet belt of the north women contribute about 25% of the total labour needed in subsidiary occupation while in rice-tea areas they contribute only 13%. On an average, women contribute 16% of the total labour required in subsidiary occupations (ESCAP, 1997). In 1996, 54 million rural women worked in township and village enterprises or 41.4 percent of TVE employment (UNDP, 1998).

After rural reform, the mushrooming of industries in the countryside attracted many women (men as well) to become wage earners. Structural change in the rural economy opened up wide opportunities for rural women in paid as well as self-employment.

## FOOD SECURITY

Poverty is treated as a communal problem in China and the statistical system focuses on the household rather than the individual. Policy makers do not attend to poor women and men outside officially designated poor areas (UNDP, 1998).

China has to support 22% of the world's population on about 7% of the arable land (EIU, 1998). China's cultivated

land resource base is among the poorest in the world. The per capita cultivated land is less than 0.1 ha, which is approximately 29.2% of the world's per capita average. In view of this and other factors, food security in China is a great challenge.

The expansion of rural agricultural and agro-industrial activities in China dramatically reduced the incidence of poverty in 1978-85 from 33% to 9%. However, in the later half of the 1980s, reductions in income pushed poverty into reverse direction. By 1989, the number of income-poor people in rural areas increased to 103 million. In 1994, women had only an overall 38.1% share in total income earned (UNDP, 1997). Wage gender gaps between the earnings of men and women subsist and even widen. The information for rural China is harder to analyse because much income is earned by the family as a unit and cannot be accounted for by individuals. But according to the Ministry of Labour, in 1995, women in agriculture earned 80 percent as much as men while in rural non-agricultural jobs they earned only 51 percent as much (UNDP, 1998)

### POLICY AND PLANNING FOCUS

In order to achieve household food security, policy makers and planners in China need to:

- ✓ develop provincial-level production system-specific data bases on gender-specific activities;
- ✓ train provincial leaders and central line-agency officers to develop gender-sensitive planning and programme formulation;
- ✓ create a supportive environment to adopt participatory approaches in order to accommodate people's voices in policy and planning, particularly women's;
- ✓ formulate gender-sensitive policies and plans based on gender-disaggregated need assessment at national and provincial level ;
- ✓ develop a rural technology and training agenda to assist rural women improve their productivity and household income;
- ✓ explore land reform policy so that women's land titles will be ensured;
- ✓ give priority to women's participation in the poverty alleviation programmes; and
- ✓ improve women's access to production inputs including credit and labour-saving tools and equipment.

### PROGRAMME FOCUS

Agricultural and rural development programmes in China need to include the following areas of intervention to become gender-sensitive in order to achieve the ultimate goal of development:

- ✓ increase women's participation in animal husbandry, fishery and forestry training and technology transfer programmes;
- ✓ focus on the development of drudgery-reducing technology in order to minimize women's work load;
- ✓ transfer technology directly to rural women to increase productivity of agriculture and allied sectors and sideline activities;
- ✓ provide women with training in appropriate technology including soil conservation and water-harvesting methods;
- ✓ launch adult literacy programmes for rural women to enable them to benefit from new technologies and improved methods to increase production;
- ✓ develop programmes to increase women's access to credit and other production inputs;
- ✓ adapt higher agricultural education, vocational education and extension training curricula to be apt to integrate participatory and gender-sensitive approaches to technology development and transfer.

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