

Environmental Health In Rural Yunnan

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Yunnan Province is a scenic part of China where beautiful rivers such as the Chang Jiang (Yangtze), Lan Cang Jiang (Mekong) and the Nu Jiang (Salween) run through. There are at least 25 Minority Nationalities in Yunnan and these groups have many colourful festivals. The sub-tropical climate in Yunnan allows for a high diversity of plant and animal growth. Tourism is an important industry in Yunnan. However, the natural beauty of Yunnan's countryside faces challenges that could damage the ecology. I would like to highlight 3 areas that affect the health of people living in rural parts of Yunnan:

- a) Deforestation
- b) Water and Hygiene
- c) Rubbish Disposal

Deforestation Credit should be given to the authorities for the strict laws against logging and cutting down of trees (since 1997). Deforestation is linked with soil erosion (and therefore poorer farm income) and with damage to local water sources. As many remote villages are located on steep slopes, deforestation increases the risk of devastating landslides.

Water and Hygiene The health of any community is directly related to availability of clean drinking water. A lack of clean water will increase the rate of gastro-intestinal diseases. If villagers have to boil water, the forestry situation worsens since villagers usually use wood fires. The lack of sanitation allows untreated human faeces to contaminate water sources, leading to a high incidence of Typhoid, Cholera, and other water borne diseases.

Rubbish Disposal Currently, there is no proper rubbish disposal and treatment set-up in rural Yunnan. This was perhaps alright in the past when farmers lived basically on local subsistence. However, with modernisation, there is a dramatic increase in non-biodegradable rubbish. Most of these is just dumped onto small hill slope or rivers.

Suggestions While laws and government intervention is crucial (eg no plastic bags in LiJiang), change needs to come from within the communities themselves. Participative education at grass-roots levels (eg using CHE – Community Health Education – methods) would be useful in helping villagers see that they are responsible for their own environment.