



**UCLG**  
Committee

Social Inclusion  
Participatory Democracy  
and Human Rights

**Inclusive Cities  
Observatory**

## « NEW MIGRANT INCLUSION POLICY IN A TRANSIENT COMMUNITY »

Qingbo Community in Chengdu, China

*Period of implementation: 2009 (launch) | Study case written in 2010*

This case of implementing new migrant inclusion policy at the local level in China is contextualized within a typical transient situation during rapid urbanization and city expansion, and a situation in which traditional local public administration is being replaced by governance with citizen participation. The case illustrates participation and inclusion policy implementation in a newly formed neighbourhood consisting of former native villagers who lost their land and the newly arrived residents living in a gated apartment community. By setting up local inclusive governance institutions and regulations and by applying some participatory approaches to integrate socially segregated residents, social conflicts and tensions have been significantly alleviated. The policy started in early 2009, and remains in force. Almost all residents in the community, both native villagers and new residents, are beneficiaries. In addition, special attention is paid to dozens of vulnerable families. Local government also benefited from lessened social conflicts and tensions caused by segregation.



The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** was launched in 2008 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights with the aim of creating a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. The initiative was developed with the scientific support of Professor Yves Cabannes (University College of London) and the Centre for Social Studies (CES) from the University of Coimbra. At present, the Observatory contains more than sixty study cases mostly developed between 2008 and 2010. Even though many of these cases refer to policies that have already come to an end, they still have much to offer: from capitalizing on the learning acquired by other local authorities to discovering suggestive and alternative means to address social inclusion challenges from a local perspective.

## Context

### *City context*

Chengdu is a historic provincial capital located in Sichuan Province in central China. The registered permanent population of the city is 11 million, with 3 million living in urban settings. In addition to permanent residents, 3 million migrants<sup>1</sup> are also registered in central city areas, bringing the population of the six central districts to approximately 5-6 million in total (*Chengdu Statistics...* 2010).

Although Chengdu is less developed than China's largest megacities, because it is the capital city of a heavily populated province, the city has attracted most of the migrants within the province and many from other provinces who move to make a living and eventually to settle there. Like other parts of China, since the inception of economic reform and marketization in early 1980s, the city has expanded rapidly. In recent years, about half of local real estate has been purchased by non-local residents. Newly arrived migrants have been buying apartments in communities developed by real estate companies on peripheral urban lands.

### *Decentralization context*

China is a unitary state governed by a single political party, the Communist Party of China. There are four government designations in China: in order of authority, these are central, provincial, municipal, and district/township level. Chengdu is one of the 369 large cities having the authority to establish districts (UCLG 2008). For this policy case, the governmental level (authority) *responsible for implementing* the policy is the district, or municipal level, and the level (authority) *implementing* the policy is at a neighbourhood (or 'community') level and the sub-district offices under the direction of the district governments. The cases discussed here are located in Qingbo Community (called *she qu* in Chinese), in a township in the Qingyang District of Chengdu.

Though China has adopted decentralization strategies within the overall context of strategic economic modernization, and the fiscal power is relatively decentralized to the provincial and municipal levels, activities of local governments remain subordinated to central supervision and direction. Local governments are responsible for and play a major role in the delivery of basic public services, including social security programs, primary education, health care, infrastructure, etc. Due to limited capacity and resources, however, the rural or semi-rural neighbourhoods (communities) are supposed to fund part of their own public services, including neighbourhood security, sanitation, garbage collection, and even some pension programs.

Local community (the *shequ*) is now the basic cell of urban Chinese society, having gradually replaced the 'work unit system' since the policy of 'opening-up' in the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese Communist Party has acted to replace one form of collectivity (work unit) with another (*shequ*) (Bray 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Most migrants are not registered in the receiving locality. According to some non-systematic research results, only about one-third of migrants are registered.

<sup>2</sup> The social system of 'work units', formerly the predominant organizing logic of urban residences, has gradually gone out of existence. In order to maintain social control over society, since early 1990s, 'community units', typically made up of people working in the same enterprise or government office and living together in a residential compound organized by their employer/community came into being and have been set up as the fundamental base of China's transition society.

At the neighbourhood level (*shequ*/communities), residents elect their respective representative councils. These local councils in turn nominate representatives to higher-level bodies at the town, which in turn nominate candidates for county councils, and so on for city and provincial levels. A second governing body established at each level (from the district to the central) is a People's Congress comprising office holders from respective lower level committees. Community/neighbourhood council elections take place every three years. At the district level and above, officials stand for election every five years. Local communities elect their respective councils, but only after the candidates have been subjected to a prior screening process. Elections can also be influenced by the sub-district government offices.

Recently, Chengdu municipal government has been pushing through a balanced and integrated urban-rural pilot reform. One pillar of this reform is grassroots democracy. Municipal governments urge local communities to carry out citizen participation strategies to improve public services, especially in rural and semi-rural communities. Among these communities is the Qingbo community.

### *Social context*

In most instances of rapid urbanization in China, lands collectively owned by native villagers are acquired by the local government. Real estate companies frequently pay local governments for permission to develop blocks of apartments on agricultural land, which they then sell to newly arriving residents. The neighbourhoods made up of these new apartments are called *new style neighbourhoods*. They are gated communities that hire their own property management agencies, privately paid security patrol, garbage collection services, household maintenance, sewage, gardening, and so on. Usually those able to afford to live in these neighbourhoods are wealthier than native villagers.

Villagers losing their land are compensated by the local government with cash, a pension program, and apartments built in the locality for those displaced by the new construction. These neighbourhoods are called *replacement neighbourhoods*. Between new style neighbourhoods and replacement neighbourhoods, social distance is measured in income, educational attainment, possession of a household registration, and geographic location.

Another important social problem background is native villagers' livelihood. Though local government will compensate them for land acquired by purchase or eviction, native villagers' livelihoods become unsustainable because their skills, age, and education render them uncompetitive in the emerging job market. The majority of displaced families, that is, those living in replacement communities, are excluded from the job market to which residents in new neighbourhood have access. At the same time, to become vested in the social security programs the government established for them, they have to invest cash monthly until they are 55 (female) or 60 (male) years old.<sup>3</sup>

Qingbo community, where this policy is being implemented, is located in one of the five downtown districts, Qingyang District, in the west of Chengdu. Before 2004, the neighbourhood was principally a farming village of native villagers and recent rural migrants. This district

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.chengdu.gov.cn/GovInfoOpens2/detail\\_allpurpose.jsp?id=sUPwV90ncgvhyUdPz9yM](http://www.chengdu.gov.cn/GovInfoOpens2/detail_allpurpose.jsp?id=sUPwV90ncgvhyUdPz9yM).

contains 14 sub-district government offices serving 75 communities, with a total population of 1 million, among which 460,000 are migrants (*Qingyang...* 2010).

Qingbo community is located between the downtown and suburbs, and hosts around 13,000 households, among which are 1,200 households of native former villagers who have lost their land, 300 households that have not lost their land property; 1,000 households of villagers who lost land and moved in from outside the community (replacement neighbourhood); and 1,300 households of newly arrived residents in nine new-type neighbourhoods. About 5,400 rural migrants from elsewhere in the region live in this community, as a part of the more than 30,000 total population (Qingbo Community documents and profiles).

## Policy development

This policy case is contextualized in a typical transient situation during rapid urbanization and city expansion in China<sup>4</sup>, and a situation in which reforms have changed the role of local urban government in terms of economic and fiscal management, the provision of public goods and services, and the strength and structure of local administrative units (Yusuf & Saich 2008).

In hundreds of this kind of local community and among nearly 10 million people in urban Chengdu, about half of the population are newly arrived migrants. This case illustrates efforts to implement a policy of participation and inclusion in a newly formed neighbourhood consisting of former native villagers (from the Chengdu Municipality) who lost their land, and the newly arrived residents in gated communities and apartments, including other rural migrants. The neighbourhood is trying to implement local democracy by setting up local inclusive governance structures and institutions, and by applying some participatory approaches to integrate socially segregated residents and alleviate social conflicts and tensions.

The policy is a joint effort of local governments and non-government organizations. Since 2006, the municipal government has launched an aggressive program to achieve balanced rural and urban development, of which an important aspect is the reform of grassroots democracy, to engage and empower locale people in their own affairs. This case illustrates how a typical transient grassroots community in China gained legitimacy as an entity of governance through implementing the municipal government's policy for more inclusive and participatory governance and better public services.

There are three major dimensions in the case: participation, livelihood, and inclusion. The policy goal is to include former villagers and newly arriving residents in institutionalized and participatory decision-making, to monitor public affairs, and to enhance livelihoods of disadvantaged groups.

## Background

Like many other larger cities in China, Chengdu has expanded greatly in recent years. Many suburban villages near downtown have been transformed into urban areas. Farmers' lands have been acquired and occupied, on which new apartment buildings have been built and sold to new residents who could afford them. Native farmers who lost their land have resettled in or near the same community, but have had to face multiple risks of unsustainable incomes, segregation, lack of local public services, and weak voice in local public affairs. On the other hand, former native villagers enjoy some exclusive rights and access to collectively owned assets and resources that are not available to new residents and rural migrants. For example, the

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<sup>4</sup> By 2020, the urban population in China will reach around 470 million.

franchise to rent and run small business in the community market was initially exclusive to former native villagers.

Within the framework of Chengdu municipal government pilot reform policy on integrated and balanced rural-urban development, local communities were required and encouraged to implement some grassroots democracy reforms to engage local residents in public decisions and services. In 2008, with the consultancy and funding of the China Urban Participatory Governance Network, the Qingbo community council decided to introduce some participatory governance approaches to tackle local problems.

### *Policy goals*

The main objective is to establish a mechanism of democratic citizen participation at the local level and by means of residents' participation, to facilitate integration, minimize conflicts, and alleviate risks. As livelihoods of the vulnerable families is an important factor in exclusion, some measures of sustainable income resources and training are also taken into consideration in this program.

From this perspective, the three main axes of the policy are:

- *Enhancing livelihood*, as many inhabitants no longer have any land for farming and are not skillful or young enough to learn new trades, so most of them are excluded from the job market;
- *Promoting participation* through establishing decision-making and monitoring mechanisms to engage and empower all local residents in local governance and public resource allocation; and
- *Fostering inclusion and interaction* between residents of the two types of neighbourhood (new style and replacement neighbourhoods), which usually have very few social or economic interactions.

### *Chronological development and implementation*

#### *Phase 1: Designing and planning*

In early 2009, a support team consisting of local community cadres and staff, non-governmental organizations, and consultants was set to plan and design the policy. After four months of work, a plan emerged and was submitted to the sub-district government and district civil affairs bureau. Very quickly, the plan was accepted and approved, and relevant local governments expressed full support for implementation. A program team was then established, led by the Qingbo Community Party Secretary; a local organization, Qingyang Social Work Association, entered the community to aid in the implementation; and a team of consultants was invited to participate in and support the effort.

#### *Phase 2: Capacity building*

While the plan was being developed, capacity building training for citizen participation (awareness and approaches) was provided to local community cadres and staff. This training included workshops, policy implementation manuals, and learning visits. A program manual was prepared for every staff member of the community, and the China Urban Participatory Governance Network provided a training workshop for the program team and community staff to make sure they were fully aware of the program goals and each procedure. Then, former villagers who lost land and were now jobless received training for catering businesses. Overall,

these capacity building sessions prepared residents for citizen participation, taught understanding and practical approaches to local community cadre and staff, and provided livelihood enhancement activities for some residents.

#### *Phase 3: Establishing citizen participation institution*

The local citizen democratic participation mechanism was established and launched in early 2009 when the Community Residents Council was elected. In February 2009, with consultation of the policy support team, 21 community resident council members were elected, all of whom were former native villagers. In order to include new-type neighbourhood residents in the community governance apparatus, an additional 18 seats in the council were reserved for resident delegates from the gated communities. After completing the Charter and Regulations of the Council, the resident council began meeting monthly to discuss and decide public issues in the community.

Rules and regulations were developed and publicized in the community. A supervisory body was then established to balance the powers of Community Residents Council, and make the council more accountable and transparent by ensuring that local residents were allowed and invited to be present at the meeting of supervising council.

Next, the Democratic Financial Oversight Panel was established. The function of this panel is to supervise and administer the community revenues and public services budget allocated by the municipal government. The major sources of revenue for community expenditures on public programs are (a) revenue generated from collectively owned community assets and (b) the fiscal budget allocated by municipal government for community public services improvement.

Finally, the Property Management Committee was established. This committee is made of representatives of property management companies from eight new-type neighbourhoods and one replacement neighbourhood. By collaborating on common issues of public areas such as security patrols, sanitation and garbage collection, illegal parking, and recreation and exercise facilities, new residents and native villagers are entitled to the same facilities provided by private and public funds, which helps to alleviate the segregation between them. This collaboration has also created job positions for local residents.

#### *Phase 4: Livelihood and inclusion*

Sustainable income for vulnerable families is an important part of inclusion. To increase the incomes of these families, the community council gave special permission to some vulnerable households to run small street food and newspaper stall businesses. Usually these families are former native villagers without jobs; it increased their income and provided private services to all community residents. In order to alleviate segregation between native villagers and new residents, franchises for community businesses were granted equally to all residents. This decision served to decrease costs for small business and lower prices at the local market.

Special attention was paid to low-income and handicapped families. The Residents Council decided to allow and prepared a dozen catering service mobiles for low-income families, or give them a 50% discount for renting a small restaurant, which helps each family to have a minimum income of RMB 8,000 each year. Agreeing with the Council, a collectively owned community restaurant hired more than dozen local women who were jobless. The Residents Council also runs a handcraft workshop for handicapped people, providing them with free training and marketing.

Some recreational activities were organized to bring together native villagers and the new residents who are divided into separate neighbourhoods. The community organized housework,

fun competitions, community sports games, and community parties in which both native and newly arrived families participated. As some children of new residents and native villagers go to the same public primary school located in the community, the school, in cooperation with the community, organized painting and reading activities after class, bringing the parents together.

### *Stakeholders, beneficiaries and participatory methodologies*

Partners and members in the planning and implementation in this policy include:

- Qingyang Civil Affairs Bureau, the sub-district government office, and Qingbo Communist Party Committee. They are the local authorities and without their permission and approvals, the policy could not have been implemented solely by the community or NGOs.
- Qingyang District Social Work Association, a local non-government organization, provided livelihood enhancement services for vulnerable groups, like the vocational training and family workshop for handicapped people, and organized community fun competition, sports games, and community parties;
- China Urban Community Participatory Governance Network, who partly funded and helped develop the policy;
- A number of researchers in academic institutes, acting as consultants to the program, offered help with program design, implementation, and training;
- Real-estate property management companies contributed security patrol for the community, and opened their facilities and equipment resources to the whole community; and
- The local primary school organized activities to bring parents of native and new residents' children together to help build social ties across the community.

All residents in the community – native villagers and new residents – are beneficiaries. Residents in the community have enjoyed better local public services that meet their demands, including safer sanitation services. Vulnerable families received larger incomes. Local government also benefited from lessened social conflicts and tensions caused by segregation; they now have few disputes and conflicts to resolve, and those that remain may be resolved within the Residents Council and by residents themselves.

Throughout the process, the policy has been supported by non-government organizations, like the China Urban Participatory Governance Network and local NGOs. The policy was designed and implemented with the participation of the following organizations: After Community Residents Council, Supervision Council, Democratic Financial Oversight Panel, and Property Management Committee.

The policy transformed the local public services provision and delivery process, for example. Chengdu municipal government has set a budget of RMB 200,000 annually in each community for local public services. Before establishing the local resident participation mechanisms, local government officials were supposed to allocate this budget without consenting local residents. With the election of the Residents Council and introduction of the rules and regulations, in 2010, the Residents Council organized a team to collect suggestions from about 4,000 households on how to allocate the budget for community public services. Next, the Council categorized and discussed all the suggestions collected, and publicized the synthesized local demands for public services. Then, the Council collected public input on prioritizing these demands by asking local people to rank these categories and specific demands, and publicized

the results of the ranking and announced final selected projects. This whole process and the implementation of selected projects were monitored and evaluated by the Supervising Council and Financial Oversight Panel.

Other examples are: reserving 18 delegate seats in the Residents Council for new residents; and establishing the Property Management Committee, which reached agreements on joint security patrol and sharing community public facilities. Market booths and shops collectively owned by native former villagers are open for public bidding; however, some are reserved for native handicapped and vulnerable households.

### *Institutionalization and financing*

A major part of the policy is to establish mechanisms to ensure local residents' participation and engagement in public decision-making and supervising, so they can express their voices directly and indirectly at the local community level. All the councils and committees are designed and set-up to fulfill this purpose. Councils and panels have charters and regulations have been introduced and publicized to local people.<sup>5</sup> Regular meetings are held every month. Local residents have the right to propose or examine public expenditures at anytime necessary. At the municipal level, a similar policy has been formulated and implemented in all rural or rural-urban transient communities like the Qingbo community.

The initiative is funded mainly by the local government. The planning, capacity building, and parts of the implementation are funded by community contributions and The Ford Foundation through the China Urban Participatory Governance Network. The municipal government provides public services expenditures and routine expenses to keep the community office running. It also provides funds for community activities, including entertainment and athletic activities. Funding from the China Participatory Governance Network is allocated to planning, consultation, and participatory capacity building.

As the local government has provided offices and salaries for the community staff, the costs of implementing the policy are quite minor, about U.S.\$10,000, compared with the costs of training and capacity building. Once the councils are established and regulations are introduced, these activities become the routine responsibilities of the local community staff, and additional resources will no longer be needed.

## **Outcomes and reflections**

### *Key results and achievements*

Some key results and achievements include:

- 1) *Establishment of fundamental local democratic citizen participation mechanisms* – These include: the Local Community Residents Council, Supervision Council, Democratic Financial Oversight Panel, and Property Management Committee. These governance bodies and corresponding regulations provide a fundamental democratic citizen participation platform for local people's participation in governance. However, these are just the mechanisms established – how they will work out and whether they will function as designed are still to be fully evaluated. So far, they appear to be functioning well: following the survey of

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<sup>5</sup> Community Residents Council of Qingbo Community:



household public services demands, requests for community gardening facilities, bicycle parking shelters, replacement of light bulbs in corridors, etc. have been dealt with according to residents' wishes.

- 2) *Less segregation between native villagers and new residents* – As native villagers and new residents now interact more frequently and naturally, they do appear to become more accepting of 'the other'. For example, before the implementation of the inclusion policy, the recreational activity groups for native residents and for new residents did not interact. Now they have begun to jointly organize activities, particularly badminton games.
- 3) *Enhanced livelihoods for vulnerable families* – By providing favourable terms for vulnerable families to access more sustainable income resources, they have more money to invest in their pensions and medical insurance, and to improve their living standards. By means of a mobile catering service, rent discounts, and establishing a workshop for handicapped people, more than a dozen local families have increased their income. While conflicts broke out over compensation during farm families' forced evictions from their land, recent improvements to vulnerable families' livelihoods, has helped to release some social tensions.
- 4) *The concept of 'citizen participation' is becoming accepted among local cadres* – Before the capacity building trainings and the introduction of participatory governance approaches, local cadres dominated decision-making on public affairs. There was little or no tradition of being open and transparent with residents. With the practices of participatory approaches, local government officials found it 'helpful to negotiate with local people' and learned that some tensions could be avoided by following the regulations that local residents developed.
- 5) *Local public services improved* – The Community Residents Council and the Supervision Council have collected and forwarded proposals and suggestions from local residents and by applying the established rules of participation, community security environmental sanitation and infrastructure have improved. In addition, recreational activities for local residents have increased, thus enriching the quality of the public services provided to local people. Although improved public services could be achieved without participation of local people, the expression of the public concerning the services they receive has become an important factor in identifying which services are the highest priority and what changes to them are most needed.

### *Main Obstacles*

There are three major obstacles or challenges to this policy: (1) the balance or trade-off between mobilization and autonomy; (2) the weakness of grassroots civil society organizations; and (3) the incompatibility with meso and macro policies.

*Mobilization vs. autonomy* – Are local residents mobilized by the government to participate in these practices, or have they intrinsically realized the advantage of participation and demanded to be organized and participate in this way? Will the mobilization approaches hurt the autonomy of local residents and of grassroots organizations, and lead to governmental interference in citizen participation? Does the design and implementation plan build effective frameworks for each community, or could a 'standard framework' produce possibly unsuitable or ineffective results if not adequately 'adopted' by local autonomous actors?

*The weakness of community-based organizations* – This community has some associations of seniors and hobby groups, but these kinds of non-governmental organizations are not able to

organize local people and negotiate with local government, or help to align them with Community Residents Councils to work for the public interest.

*Incompatibility with meso and macro policies* – This policy is incompatible with the nationwide household registration system, which continues to exclude many of the new residents from registering as a local household, thereby preventing them from formal participation as a member of the Residents Council. Although 18 seats have been reserved for residents who are not registered locally, the ratio of new residents is much lower than local residents. Accordingly, the municipal budget is allocated to those who are registered as local residents, which is unfair to new residents who have settled but are not registered locally.

### Replicability

This policy and practice, that is, to include migrants and native local citizens in more inclusive manners and to foster interaction, could be replicated in many other similar communities in larger cities in China, in a transient community of a local state transforming from undemocratic representation to citizen participation, or in local communities transforming from rural to urban through rapid urbanization.

However, this case shows that there are some necessary preconditions:

- *An existing and financially sustainable community governance entity or organization* – In this case, there was a former village committee that administers public affairs. After the land was acquired and new apartments were built, the village committee maintained its function and evolved into an urban community committee. More importantly, this governing committee is financed by local government, which provides office buildings and basic salaries to the staff working for the committee.
- *Balanced resources* – To some extent, former native villagers have an advantage to bargain for power because of their collective ownership in the community. Although newly arrived citizens are more advantaged in terms of education, occupation, or income, they need to support native residents and receive support from them.
- *Private resource mobilization* – Setting up the Neighbourhood Property Management Committee was an innovative approach. Through negotiations between private companies and the Community Residents Council, private resources have been mobilized for public purposes. Native villagers and new residents now share and enjoy the same facilities, and a better security patrol service has been developed for the community as a whole.

### Further information

This case was researched and written by Ming Zhuang, PhD candidate in the China Fellowship Program at Beijing Normal University, with the help and revision of Prof. David Westendorff (University of Memphis, USA) and under the supervision of Dr. Giovanni Allegretti at the Centre for Social Studies, University of Coimbra, Portugal, in 2010. Thank you to the Qingbo Community for their support in writing this case.

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