

# Support for rural poor to continue

Policy document lays out measures to maintain aid for low-wage groups

By XU WEI  
xuwe@chinadaily.com.cn

China has mapped out priorities in its effort to continue policies that support low-income groups in rural areas and less-developed regions, a move officials and experts said will narrow the country's urban-rural divide and pave the way for common prosperity. A policy document jointly unveiled by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, on March 22 proposes measures to consolidate the results of the nation's poverty alleviation efforts and ensure they are aligned with the rural vitalization strategy.

The release came on the heels of the nation's announcement in February that China has succeeded in its fight against absolute poverty in rural areas after its 98.99 million impoverished rural residents were lifted out of poverty and 832 counties and 128,000 villages were removed from the poverty-stricken list over the past eight years.

The document reiterated the importance of setting up a sound, long-term mechanism to consolidate poverty alleviation outcomes, saying that consistent support policies and dynamic monitoring will be provided to prevent a return to poverty.

Even though some areas have been removed from the poverty-stricken list, they still lag in terms of their level of development compared with developed regions, and thus preferential policies are still required, an official with the office of the central rural work leading group said in a statement.

The official said one of the major highlights of the document was its promotion of both the growth of industries in the once-poverty-stricken areas and the need for stable employment of formerly impoverished people.

The document adheres to the ideology of pursuing common prosperity and prioritized steps to bolster development of industries, talent and support for culture and the environment across the board, the official said.

The government will continuously work to improve infrastructure in less-developed areas, including building more highways, railways and airports and initiating water conservancy and power transmission projects, the document said.

Yu Xiaohua, a professor of agricultural economics at the University of Goettingen in Germany, said increasing the income of the rural poor is key both in poverty alleviation and rural vitalization in China.

With the disposable income of urban residents at least 2.6 times that of rural residents, the narrowing of the income gap should continue to be the priority for China's rural policies going forward, he said.

He noted that a key step in efforts to increase the income of rural residents is to encourage them to find jobs in urban areas and boost the development of rural industries.



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"The bettering of the rural infrastructure and improving public services is also the pillar to enabling the increase of living standards," he said.

Liu Qi, a member of the academic committee with the China Institute for Rural Studies at Tsinghua University, said rural vitalization would require further integration between urban and rural areas, which would cover the whole rural population.

"The goal is to narrow the urban-rural divide, especially the income gap," he said.

During the process, the agricultural sector must be more efficient and

environmentally friendly, farmers should have multiple skills and rural areas should be places that are suitable for living and working, he said.

The latest document highlighted the need to implement aid measures regularly for low-income groups, especially seniors and children, in rural areas.

A dynamic mechanism based on the social security system will be established to monitor low-income groups to enable authorities to respond to cases of poverty recurrence as early as possible. The social aid programs will be carried out on a

tiered and by-category basis to make the policies more targeted and improve the quality of aid services.

To further improve the level of public services in such regions, the document pledged to keep improving the conditions of schools for children and to continue to offer favorable policies in terms of healthcare and housing security.

The government will continue to offer temporary aid to individuals who have seen a sharp decline in their living standards, and local authorities will be encouraged to provide services such as regular vis-

its and care to seniors, juniors and the disabled people, the document said.

Yu highlighted challenges that could arise with China's increasingly aging society, which could become more prominent in rural areas with the outflow of young people.

"A rural society that is faced with a stark aging problem will not be vitalized. That is why the nation must beef up investments into elderly care and healthcare facilities in rural areas while ensuring that rural children can also be well taken care of," he said.

## Yunnan's Hebian village shows promise of a diversified future

By XU WEI

As a professor who has studied poverty alleviation during his whole career, Li Xiaoyun said he was still shocked to see Hebian village on his first visit in 2015.

The village, about 40 kilometers from the border town of Mohan in Yunnan province, has 57 households and 206 people, the majority of whom are from the Yao ethnic group.

"Generally, there will be some kind of divide between the rich and the poor inside a village. But I did not see that in Hebian. Everyone in the village was poor.

"I saw lives that were extremely difficult; dark wooden homes, old and worn-out bedding, rickety furniture and people living with their livestock under the same roof," recalled Li, who is a professor of rural development and global poverty alleviation at China Agricultural University.

The fact that the villagers could

only rely on revenue from growing rice, corn and sugar cane, crops that are susceptible to extreme weather and damage from wild elephants, also meant their incomes were highly unstable. Many families went into debt to make ends meet, but their expenditures on education for their children, healthcare and daily necessities remained fixed.

This made it impossible for them to cut spending in order to repay their debts, he said.

What surprised Li even more was the level of diligence among the villagers. Some in their 80s would still harvest wood from the mountains, while most villagers would get up in the middle of the night to tap rubber on their plantations until the morning.

"From Hebian's case, we can tell that poverty does not result from laziness or a lack of intelligence," he said.

Together with teachers and students from CAU, Li initiated a project

that empowered the villagers to improve their living environment, a precondition for the development of a tourism industry.

Between 2015 and 2017, Li's team raised about 3 million yuan (\$456,000) to help the villagers build new homes based on the traditional buildings of the Yao, each with a guest room, toilet and kitchen. A conference room with a capacity of 50 people was also constructed.

A cooperative was established to manage the tourism industry, and the students instructed cooperative members on how to use computers for registering guests and issuing invoices.

The beauty of the location attracted a stream of tourists and conference goers. Some villagers gave up farming completely, while others were introduced to the cultivation of plants that could be used for traditional Chinese medicine. Others became chicken, pig and fish farmers.

The two approaches have helped villagers shake off poverty and significantly raise their incomes. Most households had a yearly income between 60,000 to 70,000 yuan in 2019, with the per capita income of the village increasing to over 30,000 yuan.

Last year, the COVID-19 outbreak dealt a heavy blow to the village's tourism sector, as it forced travel restrictions. Most households relied on their livestock and crop cultivation to survive during the height of epidemic.

An important lesson from last year, Li said, is that shaking off poverty is only the first step, and there is still a long way to go to achieve long-term prosperity.

"The process of reorienting the village away from agrarian patterns brought about a sharp increase in the income of villagers. In the meantime, the overreliance on new business models simplified the income structure of the farmers. It led to increased

vulnerability in their livelihoods," he said.

The fact that many households held on to their farmland during the development of new business models meant they could fall back on farming and also take jobs at nearby villages to make a living, Li said.

Hebian showed the importance of diversified industries in rural areas, which could bring considerable income to rural households and make them more resilient against risk.

Li called the project at Hebian village an experiment in both poverty alleviation and rural vitalization.

"It tells us that the continuous impetus from urbanization and industrialization is indispensable in consolidating the outcomes of poverty alleviation and attaining rural vitalization. Only in this way can we enable the free flow of production elements between urban and rural areas, develop the rural industries and vitalize the rural areas," he said.

### Policy Digest

#### Action urged on risks in work spaces

The Ministry of Emergency Management has urged greater prevention and control of risks in limited work spaces after detailing a list of typical production accidents on Friday.

Limited space operations involve sectors such as mining, chemicals, construction, electrical engineering, papermaking, shipbuilding, food processing, catering, municipal engineering, urban gas and sewage treatment, all of which are high-risk areas easily ignored by companies.

The ministry is asking for more effort from companies to get a better understanding of the number, location and potential risks of working in limited spaces and tightening supervision of such operations.

Safety training for temporary and migrant workers and personnel from outsourcing units should be strengthened, it said, adding that on-site workers should be provided with the necessary equipment such as that needed for gas detection, respiratory protection, ventilation, lighting and communication.

It also required the formulation of emergency plans so casualties caused by improper rescues will be avoided.

#### Central bank backs green industries

The People's Bank of China will set tools for carbon reduction to encourage commercial banks to channel more financial resources to green industries.

The PBOC said at a recent conference the move was part of the efforts to ensure the country realizes its goal of carbon neutrality before 2060, the Xinhua News Agency reported on March 25.

The central bank stressed that commercial banks should strictly implement green finance standards and create services to adjust the allocation of credit resources in a timely manner. It said further support should be extended to technological innovation and manufacturing, with an increase in the proportion of loans going to these sectors.

The central bank also stressed keeping loan growth at a stable level, stepping up services to small and medium-sized enterprises and maintaining the continuity, consistency and stability of property-related financial policies.

#### Entrepreneurship zones aim for 1.1m jobs

China expects to create over 1.1 million jobs this year in its demonstration zones for entrepreneurship, according to a notice published on March 25. The country is trying to increase employment by promoting entrepreneurship in key demographics such as university graduates and migrant workers from rural areas, said the notice issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and five other departments.

Efforts will be made to unleash the potential for entrepreneurship in social service sectors such as online education, long-distance healthcare as well as elderly care and nursery services supported by artificial intelligence technologies, the notice said.

A total of 600,000 jobs are expected to be created in these sectors this year.

By prioritizing the entrepreneurship and employment of university graduates, the country will continue to strengthen the employment-oriented cooperation between universities and companies and provide better support for entrepreneurial programs, the notice said.

According to the notice, more than 2,000 small- and medium-sized enterprises in these demonstration zones are encouraged to integrate resources and be more innovative to develop specialized products and create 100,000 jobs this year.