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The Content and Approaches of Human Resource Development in Impoverished Rural Regions in the Context of Targeted Poverty Alleviation

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Abstract: Poverty alleviation requires knowledge support. Targeted poverty alleviation, aiming to tackle rural poverty, needs to be supported by corresponding rural human resource development. Currently, China's human resource development in impoverished rural regions is faced with some major problems; a huge population distributed over a vast area, a lack of technological and cultural attainment, obsolete concepts, obsolete technical resources, and a significant gap between rural and urban education attainment. Rural human resource development, which is geared to targeted poverty alleviation, includes a variety of impoverished rural population-oriented trainings, such as intelligence development, skills training, modern professionalism & work attitude cultivation, physical & mental health education, as well as modern lifestyle & civilized manners guidance. Targeted poverty alleviation should be equipped with mechanisms of comprehensive layout & planning, coordinated advancement of development content and implementation, and a mechanism of organization & input. The approaches to the advancement of rural human resource development are enhancing basic education, building a system of vocational education and training, raising the social security level and improving the supporting mechanisms.

Keywords: targeted poverty alleviation; impoverished rural regions; human resource development

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Currently, China is at a new stage of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects. Yet, rural poverty is still a “short slab” that troubles the country’s overall economic and social development. The advancement of rural poverty alleviation and development, particularly poverty alleviation of contiguous regions in extreme poverty has been a priority of China in recent years. In 2015, with the issue of the *Decision of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Winning the Fight against Poverty*, China made a comprehensive layout for the implementation of targeted poverty alleviation strategy, explicitly proposing to tackle rural poverty through targeted poverty alleviation. As the 13th Five-Year Plan further advances, targeted poverty alleviation has gradually transformed from a macro-strategy into more concrete poverty-alleviation actions. During this process, the following questions need to be answered. How can the government-led targeted poverty alleviation strategy match the real needs of rural development? How can government-backed projects facilitate local development? How can relevant government authority transform external support into a driving force? How can rural China improve its capacity of independent development? These issues form an important basis for targeted poverty alleviation and are also key prerequisites for impoverished rural regions to achieve sustainable development.

Previous poverty alleviation campaigns featured an abnormally high “re-poverty rate,” which is common and a worldwide problem. And this can be exemplified by the situation in western China. Relevant research indicates that parts of western China, having completed rounds of poverty alleviation, are still tormented by a severe phenomenon of returning to poverty, with a high re-poverty rate ranging from 15% to 25% (30%-50% in some extreme cases). Worse still, there

are even some places where re-impoverished populations outnumber out-of-poverty populations. This proves that poverty alleviation is a tough mission and that impoverished regions should work harder on cultivating their capacity for independent development. The abnormally high re-poverty rates have also resulted in local government’s inefficient utilization of poverty alleviation funds, weakened the masses’ confidence in poverty alleviation, and tarnished the image of poverty alleviation projects (Western China Economic Development Research Center, North West University, 2013). For impoverished regions, “being economically poor” is a phenomenon resulting from a diversity of factors, such as a lack of resources, poor living conditions, traffic inconvenience, harsh environments, unequal revenue distribution, incomplete systems, insufficient infrastructure and information asymmetry. All these factors come together to further complicate China’s rural poverty. Under such circumstances, poverty alleviation has been a strategic priority of China in recent years. The Central Government has introduced a range of related policies and documents, and more importantly proposed the concepts of “targeted poverty alleviation” and “aspiration and education are required for poverty alleviation.” By doing so, it manages to develop new ideas concerning rural poverty alleviation and development, which are expected to significantly lower the abnormally high re-poverty rates of existing poverty-alleviation projects. The core of targeted poverty alleviation lies in rural China’s transformation of poverty alleviation efforts into independent development, and its formation of independent and sustainable development capacities. From whichever perspective, “people” should always be the top priority. It is necessary to “ensure the principal status of the masses and inspire endogenous power.” Only by enhancing human resource development in

impoverished rural regions and giving full play to “human capacity” can China lift those regions out of poverty and eradicate poverty at its roots.

Regarding rural human resource development, many researchers have already done corresponding studies from different perspectives. The theory of human resource investment explicitly categorizes education, health, and population mobility as investment behaviors, which can effectively improve human capacity and extend life expectancy. This theory has a far-reaching influence (Schultz, 1990). Amartya Sen’s Capability Theory of Development and Poverty further extends the scope of human development during the anti-poverty process (Sen, 2004). Leonard Nadler has also carried out in-depth research in this regard and explicitly proposed the concept of human resource development, namely, “experience of organized learning,” which generates collective performance and enables personal development through intensive learning in a given period (Nadler, 1970). Researchers in China work on the issues of rural human resource development and anti-poverty endeavor by means of education and training. By analyzing the connection between “basic education and vocational & technical training” and “farmers’ income,” Qian Xueya, et al. (2000) holds that there is a clear positive correlation between “farmers’ educational background and expertise” and “their income.” Through field investigation of impoverished rural regions in Hunan province. Liu Chunyang (2015) discovered that education and labor migration are equally crucial to farmers’ income. Technical training can help significantly increase rural households’ operational income. Pan Sisi (2007) holds that labor force’s extended life expectancy, along with improved constitution, endurance and energy, can effectively increase labor supply, raise individual productivity, gain more job opportunities, and extend working hours. According to research

done by Li Lu, et al., a sufficient stock of healthy human capital significantly helps increase personal income and economic growth (Li & Yu, 2006). The aforementioned research findings have laid a solid basis for this research work. This paper is to focus on rural human resource development in the context of targeted poverty alleviation, specify the goal of human resource development in impoverished rural regions, analyze its content, and propose corresponding measures to effectively raise the level of rural human resource development.

1. Overview of rural human resource development in current China

Targeted poverty alleviation is an important poverty alleviation approach for China at present and in the foreseeable future. In 2013, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee introduced the *Opinions on Innovating Mechanism and Steadily Advancing Rural Poverty Alleviation*, advocating the establishment of a targeted poverty alleviation mechanism. In the meantime, the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development enacted the *Implementation Plan for Building a Targeted Poverty Alleviation Mechanism*, enabling the all-round implementation of targeted poverty alleviation. Under the guidance of the targeted poverty alleviation strategy, all poverty alleviation policies and measures are designed to help households and people in real poverty. The targeted support to impoverished population is expected to eradicate factors and obstacles that cause poverty and thus achieve the goal of sustainable poverty alleviation (Wang & Guo, 2015). Corresponding poverty alleviation plans should be determined according to the specific impoverished population and poverty type in a given impoverished region. Against this background, human resource development strategies targeting the impoverished

rural regions should be implemented in such an active way as to echo the requirements and characteristics of targeted poverty alleviation.

Full considerations should be given to the reality of rural human resources before relevant development activities are initiated. Judging from the current situation, China's rural human resources are primarily characterized by three features. The first one is a large rural population. According to the 2014 statistics, the rural population of China was 619 million, accounting for 45.23% of the national population. Moreover, the 2015 statistics also indicated 277.47 million migrant workers, a year-on-year increase of 1.3%. Among the migrant workers, 168.84 million were of an "outlander" category while the remaining 108.63 million were locals (a 2.7% year-on-year increase) (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2016). Thus, rural China enjoys abundant human resources. The second feature is a lack of technological and cultural attainment among rural populations. According to the statistics in 2015, of all migrant workers in China, 1.1% were completely illiterate; 14% completed primary education; those with an educational background of middle school, high school and junior college or above respectively accounted for 59.7%, 16.9% and 8.3%. The proportion of the high school or above educated group saw a year-on-year increase of 1.4%. When it comes to migrant workers away from their hometowns (outlanders), the high school or above educated group accounted for 27.9%, a year-on-year increase of 1.9%; while among migrant workers staying at their hometowns (locals), this figure was 22.6%, a year-on-year increase of 1.2% (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2016). According to some researchers, migrant workers away from their hometowns outperformed those staying at hometowns both in terms of educational background and technological

attainment. There is some ideological progress among the rural population, but rural residents are less adaptive than their urban counterparts to social development (Wang, et al. 2015). The third feature is a lag in rural human resource development. Regarding education resources, rural area is left far behind urban area. And this can be exemplified by the region of Mount Wuling (Hunan), whose per capita GDP was RMB16,471, merely 39% and 45% of the national and provincial average and whose per capita revenue was only 13% and 25% of the national and provincial average. Its education is even less competitive, due to a severe shortage of teaching and laboratory facilities in the primary and secondary schools. Its number of teachers per 10,000 primary and secondary school students was 13.8 less than the provincial average (Hunan). Also, it has large percentages of poverty-stricken students and left behind children. The result of Human province's sixth census in 2010 revealed that the average schooling years for the local population (age group at and over 6) in the greater region of west Hunan was 8.49 years. Besides, there is also a severe shortage of vocational education and training. For example, the city of Zhangjiajie, with a population of over 1.7 million, only has one higher vocational college and five secondary vocational schools. In terms of government function, those government-held vocational training sessions are still faced with such problems as insufficient input, unsatisfactory output and development under performance (Li, 2009). Therefore, more efforts should be made to improve the form and content of vocational training. The very existence of these problems has severely restricted the effective emancipation of rural human resources. That explains why rural China, though boasting a huge stock of human resources, has a very limited accumulation of human capital, which subsequently affects the development of the rural economy and society.

2. The content and mechanism of rural human resource development in the context of targeted poverty alleviation

According to the strategic anti-poverty positioning, i.e. targeted poverty alleviation, the advancement of rural human resource development and the mobilization of rural China's abundant human resources will provide impoverished rural regions with powerful support of knowledge and manual labor. Rural human resource development in the context of targeted poverty alleviation, as its name suggests, targets rural human resources, or rather impoverished rural populations, offers more training sessions to enhance human capital, and improves the labor force's health and knowledge. From a perspective of human capital, human resource development includes, in Gary Stanley Becker's words, "knowledge, skills and health" and covers a range of aspects from knowledge, technology and information to competency; it also concerns the labor force's health, physical ability, intelligence, attitude, and values. Based on rural China's human capital strength, basic capacity and current levels of human resource development, as well as the needs of the targeted poverty alleviation strategy, more importance should be attached to the following three aspects when it comes to China's rural human resource development.

The first aspect is targeted intelligence development for impoverished rural population. It means increasing the input of basic education in impoverished rural regions to improve the quality of local basic education and lay a solid basis for impoverished rural regions to cultivate a fresh development force. As a basic mission of rural human resource development, this intelligence development also determines the effect and level of subsequent sustainable human resource

development.

The second aspect is targeted skill training for impoverished rural labor force. In the context of targeted poverty alleviation, skill training mainly falls into two categories. One is to equip the transferred labor force in impoverished regions with the necessary skills and expertise required by jobs in the secondary and tertiary industries; the other is to cultivate talents specialized in the development and promotion of agricultural technology to facilitate agricultural modernization in impoverished rural regions.

The third aspect is professionalism and work attitude cultivation in impoverished rural regions. Regarding the requirements of knowledge and competence, there are significant differences between traditional agricultural work and modern agricultural and industrial work. Given that, human resource development in impoverished rural regions should prioritize the cultivation of rural laborers' modern professionalism, work attitude and adaptivity to various economic and social conditions.

The fourth aspect is physical and psychological health education for impoverished rural population. Physical and psychological health is a key indicator of human resource levels. Targeted poverty alleviation should create a good environment for working and living in impoverished regions and at the same time keep improving residents' health and instilling in them a right view of health. That is because being physically and psychologically healthy is conducive to the accumulation of high level human resources.

This fifth aspect is the popularization of modern lifestyle and civility among impoverished rural populations. The goal of targeted poverty alleviation is to lift people in impoverished regions out of poverty, build their capacity for sustainable development, and help them realize a well-off professional and family life as soon as possible.



educational poverty alleviation

Accordingly, the enhanced economic strength and raised development level should be accompanied with the inclusion of modern lifestyle and civility. More specifically, human resource development should take the initiative to guide people in impoverished regions to abandon established lifestyle and ideologies no longer conforming to modern civilization and popularize modern knowledge through various approaches.

Based on these aspects, the goal of human resource development in impoverished rural regions in the context of targeted poverty alleviation should be conformed to the general goal of impoverished regions' economic and social development and matched with the overall strategy of local targeted poverty alleviation. This human

resource development goal can be divided into three basic objectives; direct objective, specific objective, and ultimate objective (Teng & Wang, 2013). The direct objective targets short-term development of impoverished rural regions; focuses on improving local residents' literacy, skills and scientific concepts to help cultivate good learning and living habits, improve health and constitution, and form professionalism, work attitude and values aligned with modern society. The specific objective covers a range of targeted poverty alleviation and development indicators, such as stable jobs and incomes, improved health, extended life expectancy, improved life quality, rising job satisfaction, enhanced employment competitiveness and flexibility, progressing agricultural modernity

and improved rural ecology. The goal is to facilitate the full realization of targeted poverty alleviation and development in impoverished regions, comprehensive improvement of impoverished regions' economy and society, and the all-round development of local residents.

In accordance with the main content, rural human resource development in the context of targeted poverty alleviation should comply with the following mechanisms.

The first is the mechanism of comprehensive layout and planning, which covers two major aspects. First, human resource development in impoverished regions should be included in the corresponding (provincial level) regional plan of economic and social development and supported with provincial level comprehensive layout and coordinated planning. By means of urban/rural integration, regional connections and inter-divisional cooperation, relevant government authorities should formulate a human resource development plan for impoverished rural regions in the context of targeted poverty alleviation. Second, human resource development in impoverished rural regions is not an isolated mission. Instead, it should be aligned with the overall economic and social development of those regions, with related tasks included into the overall planning of local economic and social development. Moreover, it is expected to integrate with targeted poverty alleviation related policies, action plans and missions to generate a human resource development plan completely geared to the targeted poverty alleviation strategy.

The second mechanism concerns coordinated advancement of development content and the implementation plan. The development content should well reflect the strategic needs and development requirements of targeted poverty alleviation and bring development objects, details and priorities into an organic whole. And the

development content and implementation plan should also be coordinately advanced in accordance with the development level and stage. This mechanism should realize full coverage and highlight priorities, focusing on both short-term results by striving to tackle real challenges and pressing problems and the long-term process of constant incremental advancements. Only by taking both short-term and long-term factors into account, can this mechanism enable the coordinated advancement of development content and the implementation plan.

The third mechanism is about organization and input. Human resource development in impoverished rural regions is a typical type of government's basic public service, for which government's responsibilities and functions should be highlighted. First, higher level government authorities are responsible for the overall planning of human resource development in impoverished regions and the establishment of training management institutions at county, municipal and provincial levels. The provincial government should found a special organization in charge of coordinating rural human resource development and management, build a unified organizing and operating system, and ensure the smooth proceeding of human resource development. Second, lower level government authorities should develop clear plans targeting investment subjects, objects and models, as well as capital sources so as to ensure sufficient capital input in human resource development plans matched with targeted poverty alleviation strategy.

3. Corresponding approaches of human resource development in impoverished rural regions in the context of targeted poverty alleviation

In the context of targeted poverty alleviation,

to advance human resource development, relevant authorities should first change the perception of government's role and acknowledge human resource development's status as a top priority in targeted poverty alleviation. Only when rural laborers are competent enough, can poverty be truly eradicated. Government authorities should also constantly enhance their support for rural human resource development and increase input of funds to provide a primary guarantee for rural human resource development.

Human resource development in impoverished rural regions mainly includes two aspects. One is an effective utilization of existing human resources. The other is development of potential human resources by substantially improving the competence of rural laborers (Deng, 1999). Full considerations should be given to the difference in the two development approaches. Therefore, rural human resource development should fully explore potential rural human resources and improve the overall competence of laborers in impoverished regions. Meanwhile, it is important to satisfy the demand of targeted poverty alleviation and rural modernization. Based on the above considerations, rural human resource development in the context of targeted poverty alleviation is mainly conducted in several approaches as follows.

3.1 Enhancing basic education in impoverished rural regions

For impoverished regions, targeted poverty alleviation is a general policy while enhancing education, turning the education tide, and bridging the gap between urban and rural education are important approaches to rural human resource development. Basic education lays a basis for individual development and is a prerequisite for human resource development. In this sense, the development of basic education in impoverished rural regions is a top priority of human resource

development. Given the overall development of current primary education in impoverished regions and favorable policies of targeted poverty alleviation, the following should be done in impoverished rural regions. First of all, diversifying investments, building compulsory education based standard schools, enriching the existing "county-dominated" basic education model, conducting rational duty division, re-assigning the duty of basic education investment to a higher level government authority, and creating a fair and equal environment for local development of basic education. In addition, relevant government authority should promote balanced development of education among regions, establish a system of regular exchanges of teachers at the front line of basic education, optimize the corresponding structure of teachers in impoverished rural regions, and improve the expertise and competence of the teaching staff (Guo, 2011). By increasing education inputs and enhancing teaching strength, China can keep improving its basic education in impoverished rural regions, raise basic education levels and lay a solid basis for human resource development.

3.2 Building a vocational and training system for impoverished rural regions

Regarding the building of a vocational and training system for impoverished rural regions, China should identify rural vocational education and training as an important approach to the effective use of existing human resources there, perfect two major types of rural vocational education institutions (i.e. town- and township-level agriculture schools and county level vocational secondary schools), and let them lead the way of intra-regional development of vocational education and training. For example, at the county level, county government should be responsible for the management of all types of training institutions and resources; it should also investigate training requirements, design training plans, organize training sessions, and

develop poverty alleviation projects based on the general requirements of the county's targeted poverty alleviation strategy. It is expected to form vocational education and training plans geared to targeted poverty alleviation and highlight key training items concerning rural labor force transfer, modern agricultural skills, health education, and life education. Relevant government authority should also increase input in vocational schools in impoverished regions; forge a comprehensively improved development landscape with highlights in areas such as basic capacity building and teaching staff construction; and improved vocational schooling. In addition, the government authority should also enhance urban/rural pairing assistance. Demonstrative vocational colleges in cities are required to assist designated rural vocational schools to form a basic pattern featuring well bridging of majors and sectors, facilitate a variety of pairing assistance activities such as exchanges between urban and rural teachers, communication between urban and rural students, and training-based interactions. These activities are supposed to direct quality resources of vocational college education towards impoverished rural regions and drive the development of rural vocational education.

3.3 Raising the social security level in impoverished rural regions

The rural social security system is designed from a peripheral guarantee's perspective to safeguard the effect and efficiency of human resource investment. It is also a focus of human resource development. Currently, the social security system of impoverished rural regions still suffers from incompleteness, low security levels and urban/rural mismatch, resulting in the rural population's poor capability to resist major challenges and external risks. This is a key factor for those already lifted out of poverty to return to a state of poverty. Given the basic conditions of today, China should

establish a "government-individual" co-financing mechanism, form a financial support system for the social security cause in impoverished rural regions, fundamentally improve farmers' social security levels, and reveal all the details of security systems concerning medical insurance and unemployment insurance. It should also take the initiative to break down urban/rural barriers, overcome the restrictions of the existing administrative division based social security management model, and enable the integration of urban and rural social security systems. While enhancing its subject of liability role during the process of social security construction, relevant government authority should also keep optimizing the system of rural social security management (Li, 2005). In short, China should keep improving all social security systems, promote related laws and regulations, popularize necessary knowledge in impoverished regions, raise the level of the social security system, and provide a strong guarantee for local human resource development.

3.4 Improving the supporting mechanism of human resource development in impoverished rural regions

Human resource development in impoverished rural regions requires a series of supporting policies and systems to ensure its performance. First, China should establish and enhance a surplus labor force transfer system for impoverished rural regions to form a unified urban/rural labor market, enable rational labor force flow, effectively alleviate impoverished rural regions' over supply of labor force, promote urban/rural interactions, and further enhance local capacity of human capital accumulation. Second, China should build a human resource development system suitable for impoverished rural regions, specify duties of all parties engaged in human resource development, form a duty supervision and regulation system of human resource development, monitor and assess

the job performance of relevant divisions, and ensure the effective implementation of all measures. Third, it also needs to build a mechanism of information release and a mechanism of employment service for rural human resource development. The information release system can help tackle information

asymmetry and well match labor force demand to supply. The employment service system can raise the employment level of impoverished rural populations, integrate human resource development with employment, and improve the efficiency and quality of human resource development.

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