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Relative poverty alleviation facilitates common prosperity

EDITOR'S NOTE

Improving people's well-being and realizing common prosperity are the essential requirements of socialism. This page focuses on relative poverty alleviation. Through relative poverty mitigation, China is pursuing common prosperity for everyone.

By ZHOU YUNBO
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Since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, with a series of targeted poverty alleviation policies such as targeted identification and implementation, China achieved the goal of lifting all the rural poor out of poverty under the current standards as scheduled, and finished building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the end of 2020. China has achieved the target of eliminating absolute poverty set in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ten years ahead of schedule, contributing remarkably to the global poverty alleviation cause.

Currently, China is advancing towards the second centenary goal of fully building a modern socialist country. Realizing common prosperity for everyone is a vital embodiment of China's modernization.

With the gradual elimination of absolute poverty, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee officially proposed consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation and establishing long-term mechanisms for eradicating relative poverty. The Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee clearly called for the effective connection between consolidating and expanding the achievements of poverty alleviation and rural vitalization, and establishing and improving the assistance mechanism for the rural low-income population and underdeveloped areas.

Shifting focus

Poverty is a social phenomenon that always exists in socioeconomic development. Relative poverty and absolute poverty are two manifestations. Absolute poverty means that under certain social modes of production and lifestyles, the disposable income of an individual or a family is not enough to satiate the basic survival or living needs of its family members, and its standard has objective materiality at a given stage of a given society. Relative poverty is a poverty state arising from people's comparison with each other, and its connotation mainly refers to the state of insufficiency when compared with others. The existence of relative poverty is related to the stages of economic development. The core connotation is income inequality and uneven distribution.

The progression from absolute poverty to relative poverty is the



A demonstration village in Wenzhou City, Zhejiang Province Photo: CFP

inevitable result of socioeconomic development. At present, China has achieved the goal of eliminating absolute poverty, and the future challenge is mainly relative poverty. Even after building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, China is still a developing country with upper middle income, and the problem of unbalanced and insufficient development remains prominent. It is necessary to further alleviate relative poverty on the basis of consolidating the existing achievements in poverty alleviation.

During the period of absolute poverty alleviation, some developed regions, such as Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu provinces, have already explored the governance of relative poverty, and even included relative poverty and its governance into local policy documents. These areas took the lead in adopting the relative poverty standard and achieved good results in poverty alleviation, which can be promoted nationwide.

Relative poverty governance is a systematic project involving fields such as economics, politics, culture, and ecology. Building a long-term mechanism to alleviate relative poverty, creating a sustainable income growth mechanism for low-income people, and enabling them to enjoy the fruits of high-quality socioeconomic development is an important guarantee for promoting common prosperity for everyone.

The connotation of relative poverty is richer, extending from a single dimension of income or consumption to multiple dimensions. Dimensions and weights can also be further refined according to urban and rural areas, regions, and different population characteristics, so as to adopt more targeted poverty reduction measures. Thus, it is possible to alleviate and even eliminate relative poverty, realize the goal "to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions" in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and make greater contributions to all mankind.

At the same time, the poverty alleviation goal concerning relative poverty should shift from meeting current basic needs to highlighting people's sense of gain, happiness, security, and development. It should serve to improve the well-being of the relatively poor and narrow their

income gap, and ultimately aim for common prosperity. Diversified identification standards of relative poverty should also correspond to diversified poverty alleviation goals, so as to continuously meet the people's evolving needs for a better life, and see that the gains of development benefit all our people in a fair way, so as to address the imbalance and insufficiency in multifaceted development.

Building a long-term mechanism

The relative poverty standards suitable for the new development stage should be formulated as early as possible and accurately target the relatively impoverished population. Government departments can consider trying out the new standards in practice and taking corresponding measures, retaining two indicator systems that can be compared with each other, and organically combining the relative poverty measurement method with income as a single dimension with the multi-dimensional poverty measurement method. Mutual correction shall be carried out at the same time. On the one hand, it can be compared with the previous single income index system to investigate its changes. On the other hand, the measurement indicators of multi-dimensional poverty degrees can be obtained to investigate the multi-dimensional poverty situation in the future, and the two indicator systems can be compared.

It is well-advised to establish a sustainable and normalized relative poverty governance mechanism. Relative poverty is multidimensional, and its alleviation requires the combination of multiple policies. Unlike the "unconventional" yet effective methods employed in eradicating absolute poverty, relative poverty governance requires normalized methods under the national governance system. Its core is to motivate groups in relative poverty to establish a mechanism to achieve their own development with endogenous power. It is necessary to strengthen the supporting role of social security, improve the health service level of county-level medical institutions, and provide assistance to the relatively poor in urban and rural areas in terms of education, medical treatment, and housing. It is necessary to bring urban relative poverty

into the scope of poverty management in the new development stage, and strive to address various institutional obstacles in the process of urban-rural integration. The poverty alleviation mechanism should be innovated to tackle the challenges confronted by special groups, for instance, exploring the coordinated pension model of society, family, and individual to solve the poverty problem of the elderly living alone and introducing relevant supporting policies for the mobile population.

It is prudent to gradually implement the relative poverty governance model of coordinated urban-rural planning. To build a long-term mechanism to eradicate relative poverty, we should adhere to the concept of relative poverty governance of urban-rural overall planning, establish a relative poverty governance system of urban-rural integration, and pay equal attention to urban and rural areas.

The coordinated urban-rural governance of relative poverty is more complex than the one-way governance of rural or urban areas. The solution of absolute poverty under China's current standards is inseparable from the rapid development of urbanization and industrialization in the process of urban-rural integration. However, due to institutional constraints or obstacles in urban-rural integration, rural residents entering cities are likely to fall into the category of potential impoverished population. The governance of relative poverty must circumvent the limitations in eradicating absolute poverty. It is crucial to build a systematic and innovative mechanism for relative poverty governance, to strive for the realization of the coordinated planning of urban and rural areas as soon as possible, so as to effectively avoid the expansion of the relatively impoverished population amid urbanization, and improve the urban-rural policy dual system.

The governance of relative poverty should be closely integrated with rural vitalization. The regional and urban-rural development gap is closely related to relative poverty. Vigorously promoting rural vitalization and improving agricultural modernization are not only significant ways to address the poverty trap caused by the urban-rural gap, but also fundamental ways to solve the problem of unbalanced and insufficient urban-rural development. Through integrating the relative poverty governance into the rural vitalization strategy, focusing on the alleviation of rural relative poverty in the context of urban-rural integration, and gradually narrowing the urban-rural development gap, common prosperity can truly be realized and the gains of development can be shared by everyone.

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Urban-rural governance drives common prosperity

By ZHAO YUAN

Guided by the pursuit of common prosperity, China is promoting urban-rural integration to make sure everyone shares the fruits of its modernization.

Bridging the divide

How is it possible to bridge the urban-rural divide and lift those relatively impoverished out of relative poverty? "The best way to alleviate rural relative poverty is to assist urbanization via the migration of rural dwellers into cities who come in search of better employment opportunities," said Vlad Mykhnenko, an associate professor of sustainable urban development at the University of Oxford.

He added that reforming the household registration system to allow ex-rural residents full citizen rights in the destination cities would be a huge step towards normalizing their status and promoting common prosperity.

Innovative measures

China has adopted a raft of measures to promote urban-rural integration so as to achieve common prosperity for everyone, such as exploring a long-term mechanism to solve the problem of relative poverty, and establishing demonstration zones for common prosperity in the eastern province of Zhejiang.

The rural population should be facilitated in their out-migration to big cities. Mykhnenko suggested that to improve the life chances of many rural dwellers, in addition to promoting their out-migration to cities, one should invest in local primary and secondary schooling and vocational training.

Ultimately, the mechanization and modernization of agriculture leads to the lowering of labor demands: machines will take over from manual laborers. So, the remaining rural labor force has to be up-skilled to be able to work with modern machinery and farming techniques, whereas the excess rural labor force can also be up-skilled to gain better-paid and more meaningful jobs in cities.