

Policies and Effects of Poverty Reduction for the Disabled in China

Zhang Dongmei at China Disabled Persons' Federation

Abstract

There are 82.96 million disabled people in China, which accounts for 6.34% of the total population, almost one sixth families nationwide or over 200 million people. Along with the economic and social development, China has also harvested a lot in the project of poverty reduction for the disabled people and explored policies and measures of Chinese characteristic to help them. However, we are faced with a rather embarrassing situation that more than 10 million disabled people nationwide are leading an uneasy life, suffering vulnerable positions and facing the severe problems and difficulties, as a result, how to establish a long-term effective system and how to promote the improvement of the policies and measures to help the poor disabled people have become a crucial and realistic problem in poverty reduction for the poor disabled, and also a global problem.

By analyzing the basic situation of the disabled people, the poverty situation and the causes to and the impacts of the poverty, the effects of the China's policies to reduce poverty for the disabled population and summarization of the rules of poverty reduction, the author raised the primary objective of the future project of poverty reduction for the disabled and the policies need to be adjusted.

The author concluded that the poverty is caused by many reasons which included social and economic factors and the impact of the external environment and the limitations of disabled people themselves. In view of these problems, the author raised a tentative idea of how to establish an effective working mechanism to promote poverty reduction for the disabled based on the demands of historical process of building a well-off society and the demands of realizing Millennium Development Goals. The key is to establish a functioning mechanism; the emphasis is to take advantages of the good timing of China's rapid economic development and make the security system and promotion measures interact with each other; the basic point is to complete the policy security system, the social security system and social assistance system for helping the poor disabled people; the fundament is to strengthen the education and training for the disabled population and improve their qualification and capabilities.

The author also believed that we could effectively reduce the poverty among disabled population during the process of building a well-off society by strengthening the efforts in supporting the disabled regarding legislation, execution, economy, morality and education.

Key words: Disabled Poverty Reduction Policy Effect

Policies and Effects of Poverty Reduction for the Disabled in China

The disabled people appeared since the day the human beings were created. It is a rather special difficult group. Disability is one of the most important factors that caused poverty and poverty worsened disability. Such an ill circle wiped the disabled people out of the mainstream society. The Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations included poverty reduction for the disabled into the priority development goals and the Chinese government responded with great support.

In Oct. 2004, the International Seminar on Poverty Reduction for the Disabled sponsored by UNESCAP was held in China, concluding with the Joint Declaration of Poverty Reduction for the Disabled. It promised to consistently provide funds and other resources for the poverty reduction policies and projects targeting the disabled and to support the development objectives, such as capacity building, of the disabled people and their organizations.

China Disabled Persons' Federation had the great honor to make a speech at the seminar on the topic of giving attention to the disabled.

1. Basic situation of the disabled in China

The data of the Second National Sample Survey of the disabled showed that by April 1st 2006, there are 82.96 million disabled people of all sorts in total which accounted for 6.34% of the total population, among which 62.25 million were living in rural

areas accounting for 75.04%. According to the annual per capita income of the families with disabled people in rural areas, statistics showed that the number of absolute poor disabled and the number of those just out of poverty with no stable subsistence added up to 13.83 million. This part of the poor disabled was included into the national poverty reduction project and covered by rural minimum living allowance system, and also the more difficult nut to crack for national poverty reduction.

2. Causes of the poverty to the disabled people and impact of poverty

For both internal and external reasons, poverty of the disabled people was caused mainly by the factors below:

First, low income and high expenditure. The per capita income of families with disabled people in 2005 was 4864 RMB in urban areas and 2260 RMB in rural areas, less than a half of the average for normal families in urban and rural areas, among which rural families with disabled people with the per capita income lower than 683 RMB accounted for 12.95%, and 7.96 % for those between 684 and 694 RMB; among the disabled people, those with multiple disabilities, such as body disability, sight disability, and intelligence disability etc, accounts for 66.91% which lead to a more tough situation for poverty reduction; disabled people of grade A and B are 24.57 million which accounts for 29.62% who could not be involved into poverty reduction activities; people of Grade C and D are 58.39 million which accounted for 70,38%; because of the disability itself and social prejudices, the employment channel

for the disabled people are limited and the employment rate is low. And the expenditures for recovering and medical care are really huge, to result in a widely spread circle that diseases caused disability and disability caused poverty.

Second, lack of knowledge and technology. According to the surveys, the illiterate population of the disabled people above 15 was 35.91 million, with the illiteracy rate of 43.29%. The enrollment of the disabled children between 6 and 14 was only 63.19% nationwide and the disabled population who had graduated from high school was only 5 million. About 85% of the poor disabled people never received any education more than junior middle school.

As a result, they had comparatively lower qualification and poor production skills, reluctant to accept new things and difficult to learn new practical techniques. They were under a rather vulnerable situation in the market competition, which would detain them from engaging in poverty reduction.

Third, lack of fund and lack of projects. Because of the dispersed residence of disabled people with 30% living in old revolutionary basis areas, ethnic minority areas, remote areas and extremely poor areas, and 70% living in non-poor areas, the fund for supporting the disabled people in non-poor areas was limited. Sometimes it would be impossible to change the situation because of the lack of fund even if they were eager to; Because the less-developed areas are blocked with transportations and information, even if any disabled people owned some money, they would also have to wait and see because of the lack of projects.

Fourth, the constraints of laggard economic and social development in rural

areas. The natural environment of the Mid and West was poor, the infrastructure construction was weak and the production structure was single and the social development was comparatively slower. All the above led to the lack of the jobs to be provided for the disabled people and lack of security policies for the disabled people. The employment rate of the disabled people was low, about 59%, lower than 29.2% of the non-disabled people. They were short of independent economic support. There were 62.25 million disabled people in rural areas, among which only 5.12% enjoy the local minimum living allowance policies, and only 11.68% received regular or irregular relief funds.

In light of the difficulties the disabled people faced, poverty reduction for the disabled would have to solve two major problems: one is to solve the problems of food and clothing thoroughly; the other is to narrow the gap and promote harmony. Poverty reduction for the disabled requires to build a long-term effective mechanism to be mainstreamed in the overall plans and relevant policies of the central and local governments, to be mainstreamed in the administration of the government accountability system, to be mainstreamed in the social security system in rural areas and to promote multiple social service measures to initiate the potentials of the disabled people and to achieve the double targets of providing and maintaining food and clothing.

3. Poverty reduction policies and measures for the disabled that successfully solved the problems of the poor disabled people.

How to solve the problems of food and clothing for disabled people and increase their income steadily should be the key components of poverty alleviation and eradication in China and national tasks to reduce poverty. Over the past years, poverty reduction for the disabled in China has yielded obvious effects with the support from the central government and the local governments and the hardworking of branches of the China Disabled Persons' Federation.

Some ten million disabled people were relieved of the problems of food and clothing and the number of absolute poor reduced from 20 million in 1992 to 10.58 million; 8.21 million disabled people received agricultural production technical trainings; since 2003, they have helped 51803 families with disabled people in rural areas rebuild the shabby houses, benefiting 63957 disabled people and 150 thousand poor people.

The achievements in the poverty reduction for the disabled contributed a lot to accomplishing the strategic targets of poverty reduction in China. In the practice, we created some measures that fit China's national conditions and the particularities of the disabled people.

First, mainstream poverty reduction for the disabled into overall planning of poverty reduction by central and local governments.

The key to include the disabled people into the mainstream society is that all policies, plans and projects should include the disabled population. Poverty reduction is a great strategic measure produced by the central government to relieve and eradicate poverty and to achieve common prosperity and the State Council had always been caring

about the poverty problems of the disabled people. In 1991, Eighth Five Year Plan for Supporting Disabled Persons was approved by the State Council to raise the objectives, guiding principles, methods and measures for the poverty reduction for the disabled as components of national plan and carried out poverty reduction for the disabled in an organized and planned way. In order to fully implement the Seven Year Priority Plan for Poverty Alleviation, the government formulated the State Plan for Poverty Reduction of the Disabled People(1998-2000) and adopted a lot of more powerful and better-targeted policies and measures in order to increase the financial inputs and efforts to address the priorities. In 2001, the government formulated the Poverty Reduction Plan for Rural Disabled (2001-2010) to include poverty reduction for the disabled in rural areas into the Poverty Reduction Program for Rural China, to coordinate the functions and identify the targets, guiding principles and major measures in the ten years, which became the guidance of poverty reduction for the disabled in the new era.

The local governments targeted the poor disabled people in a real sense and included the specific measures and requirements of helping the disabled into the poverty reduction plans of local government. Plans of poverty reduction for the disabled were drafted to strengthen the leadership in organizing the relevant departments and implementing the projects and in providing support of human resources, funds and materials.

Second, maximize the guidance of the government and increase policy support.

The disabled people is a special and difficult group. Their proportion of poverty is

high, and the status was tough. Poverty reduction for the disabled becomes one of the hardest nut to crack. Starting from 1992, the central government and relevant departments had called on conferences of poverty reduction for the disabled for 6 times in order to improve the supportive policies. The local governments gradually established the social security system and cooperative medical care system in rural areas along with reforms to rural taxation system and formulated a series of supportive policies and measures to improve the production and life conditions of the disabled people.

The local governments included the poverty reduction for the disabled into the administration of government accountability system. It is proved by practice that the guidance and the supporting policies of the government is key to poverty reduction for the disabled.

Third, mobilize the social resource to help the poor disabled people.

Poverty reduction was not only the government's responsibility, but also the society's. Poverty reduction for the disabled always needs the participant of the whole society. Based of Chinese tradition to help the poor and advantage political system of China, we should encourage government agencies, the business sectors, the collective economic organizations, volunteer organizations, Party members, officials, students and people in the neighborhood to pair off or to foster partnership between agencies and households with disabled persons. The roles of the trade unions, China Youth League, All-China Women's Federation, China Association for Science and Technology, and commercial chambers are put to use. For many years, the Party or

executive organs and businesses supporting villages, the Party members and officials supporting households, the volunteers, neighbors and rich households pair off with disabled families have not only played very important part in helping the poor disabled people but also promoted the fashions of helping the poor and helping the disabled. Mobilizing the participation of social sectors has become an effective measure for solving the problems of food and clothing for disabled people.

Fourth, earmark funds specialized for poverty reduction of the disabled and build up financing mechanism of multiple channels for the disabled.

In the poverty reduction for the disabled, the government earmarks fund of credit for poverty reduction. In 1992, the government released recovering loans, subsidized-interest loans of the central finance to reduce poverty of the disabled. The recovering loans gradually rose from 100 million in the period of Eighth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development to 800 million 1999 onward each year,with a total amount of 7400 million RMB by the end of 2006. In order to make good use of the loans, the Agricultural Bank of China formulated the Management Rules of the Recovering Loans and issued the Notice to Strengthen the Management of the Recovering loans and to Avoid the Risk. To solve the problems for the loans to reach households and individuals, China Disabled Persons' Federation along with the Agricultural Bank of China formulated the Rules to Improve Work of the Recovering Loans to streamline the system, identify the duties, lower the threshold of getting the recovering loans, positively pursue the effective use of the recovering loans,try to make more poor disabled people benefit form it,and ensure the

safe revolving and using of the recovering loans, so as to benefit as many poor disabled as possible and to ensure the safe circulation and use of the loans. There has not been any case of corruption due to embezzlement of the recovering loans up to now. By the end of the Tenth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, 80% of the recovering loans had been in place and over 5 million poor disabled were relieved of the problems of food and clothing.

The local governments has also strengthen the efforts in helping the poor disabled people and arranged financial funds for poverty reduction of the disabled. During the period of Tenth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, the government spent 75 million in public lottery which led the local governments to spend 650 million in rebuilding the houses of the poor disabled families; Local governments arranged subsidized-interest loans and applied for loans from banks and financial institutions; Some places strengthened the cooperation with the domestic enterprises and international organizations to attract funds; Some invested money on the employment and training for the rural poor disabled people. These methods enlarged the channels for collecting funds for the disabled people and effectively promoted poverty reduction for the disabled.

Fifth, adopt methods for support to reach households

Specific and targeted policies and approaches ought to be adopted in light of the character of the disabled that they live scattered. At the beginning of poverty reduction, according to the pilots, we concluded that we should make sure the support reach households. Since 1992, this principle was specified as company partnering

with rural households to radiate to households and individuals and was promoted positively. In 1998, we promoted the microfinance method with its merits in low cost, fast effects, large coverage and high return rates and easier access for the disabled people. In 2000, poverty reduction for the disabled stressed the industries that could effectively solve the problems of food and clothing, such as planting, livestock breeding, handicrafts, and household sideline productions, to meet the requirements of the development of the local market economy and to match up with the local major industry and take care about the needs of disabled people. In 2003, the Federation established poverty reduction basis for the poor disabled that covers production, pre-job trainings and support reaching households to address the subsistence problems of the disabled and to increase their income, gradually shaping up a system of basis supporting poverty reduction. At present, China has established over 2693 county-level basis to help 275000 poor disabled people out of poverty. It is proved by practice that adopting the practical planting, processing and raising projects and promoting the company-to-family –styled basis according to the local resources and demands of the market would be an effective method to solve the problems of food and clothing.

Sixth, strengthen the grassroots service system for poverty reduction of disabled people to provide timely and effective services for rural disabled people.

According to the Decisions for Strengthening the Constructions of the Grassroots Disabled Persons' Federation of the Coordinating Committee for Disabled People under the State Council and the Implementation Rules for Poverty Reduction of Rural

Disabled People (1998-2000) of the six major ministries and commissions, local governments further strengthened the constructions of the grassroots Disabled Persons' Federation and service centers for disabled people on the basis of "promoting constructions by tasks and achieving the tasks through constructions". By the end of 2006, there were 16290 county-level and town-level service centers, with 22699 staff, which initially formed the service system for rural disabled people. The service centers mainly dealt with the day to day work of poverty reduction for the disabled, learning about the actual situation of the poor disabled people, coordinating the releasing and returning of the recovering loans, helping the poor disabled people to choose proper businesses, implementing specific measures and coordinating the local agricultural and scientific departments to provide the disabled with services before, during and after production.

Seventh, stimulate the enthusiasm of the disabled people and enhance the four self-reliance spirits.

Poverty reduction for the disabled requires help from all over the country and society, however, more importantly the efforts themselves. We should stimulate the spirits of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-improvement, self-reliance to mobilize their enthusiasm and encourage them to conquer the difficulties and participate in production and labor. Local governments carried out new practical technical trainings or drew on existing trainings for the poor disabled people to effectively improve their scientific and literate qualification and professional skills which strengthened their confidence in wiping out the poverty and stimulate their wish to strive for a good

future. The disabled people changed the false view in the society that the disabled could only rely on relief but can never be developed in their capability. The Four Self-Reliance spirits of the disabled people had become their inner power to taking part in poverty reduction activities.

4. Difficulties facing poverty reduction for the disabled

In spite of the progress of poverty reduction for the disabled, the imbalance of the social economic development, the political limitations and the limitations of disabled people themselves led to the result that their productions and living conditions are still difficult and there might be many new problems as well.

First, the total population of the poor disabled people is still huge. There are so far over 10 million rural poor disabled people still facing the problems of food and clothing. Even among the people with sufficient subsistence, their return to poverty is common to see. During the period of Tenth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development, about 400000 people went back to poverty every year which became the most difficult and important task for the poverty reduction for the disabled in the new era. The number of poor disabled people without houses or living in dangerous houses stand at around one million and the basic production and living conditions of the poor disabled people had not change essentially.

Second, the difficulty of supporting the poor disabled had increased. The disabled people are one of the vulnerable groups in the society. Because of their disabilities and the external barriers, they face a large variety of troubles. And the fact that almost

85% of the poor disabled people never receive educations more than junior middle school, they are in lack of professional skills which added up to the difficulties in poverty reduction. As a result, they could not enjoy the work-for relief, labor transfer and other major poverty reduction measures implemented by the government. The poor disabled people were also restricted in choosing businesses, because quite a number of disabled people are not competent enough for some comparatively high-tech business if without any trainings.

Third, lack of timely and effective services. Along with the further reform to rural economic system and restructuring of rural industry, the key to reduce poverty for rural disabled people is to provide timely and effective service before, during and after production, for their products to enter the market faster so as to reduce their poverty. However, the present social service system in rural areas are of business operations and charge for the services it provides, so the disabled people are too poor to enjoy those services. The disabled people service centers established in recent years have formed a network and done a lot for the disabled people but could not meet their urgent demands because of the lack of human resources and funds.

Fourth, the shortage of labor and the external barriers. The rural poor disabled people mainly live on cultivation which needs effective labor to work to increase the income, But the effective labor is what is absent in a disabled family. No labor means low income. And the disabled people couldn't adapt quickly to the adjustment of the production condition and prospect of the market, either. Thus, it would be difficult for the poor disabled people to get more income despite the improved agricultural

conditions.

5. Adjustment to strategy and policies of poverty reduction for the disabled in the future

To secure the living and development rights of the disabled people and to promote the harmonious relationship between the disabled group and other groups is the key component of the construction of a well-off society and a harmonious socialist society, which reflects upon government concentration on human needs and increase of support to poor disabled people. In the future, poverty reduction for the disabled should aim to solve the problems of food and clothing and improve the living standard of the rural poor disabled people and narrow down the gap between rich and poor. More than 10 million people short of food and clothing should be helped to solve the problem. Those who have enough to eat and to clothe should be supported to make more money. About 1 million poor disabled in the mid and west who are able to engage in production should be delivered with skill trainings. The old houses of poor disabled people in rural areas should be rebuilt to benefit 1 million households of disabled people.

Poverty reduction targeting the disable requires the establishment and improvement of the long-term effective mechanism and the government supportive policies with clear target and obvious effect, which may include two types of policies:

First, include the poor disabled in the rural minimum allowance system and relief system. Regarding those disabled people of Grade A and B who have not any

working capacity and could not solve the problems of food and clothing by support of poverty reduction, the local governments should include the poor disabled people eligible into the allowance system as soon as possible in order to increase the coverage of the poor disabled people in the minimum allowance system; Regarding those disabled people of Grade C and D, we should take the method of relief and give relief by type and by phase.

Second, formulate supportive policies targeting the disabled. Among the absolute poor disabled and low incomers in rural areas who still have problem with food and clothing, those who are able to engage in production and can be relieved of food problem and can increase their income should be continuously mainstreamed into overall plan of national poverty reduction. They should be included in the village-based development project, reform to make subsidized-interest loans reach households and training for labor transfer, with earlier implementation. Government should give special support to them in terms of earmarked funds and credits. Financial support from local governments should be ensured to really be spent in poverty reduction for the disabled, to really reach the poor households of disabled people, to help them develop production and organize skill training, to enhance their capability of self-accumulation and self-development and to ensure that they really walk out of poverty. For these groups of disabled people, the government will produce special supporting policies in terms of recovery, education, employment and medical care.

The poor disabled people in rural areas are the most difficult crowd in China. This is why poverty reduction for the disabled means a lot. China Disabled Persons'

Federation along with relevant departments have been working together closely to pursue better methods, policies, measures and more effective working tools favorable for the disabled people in order to solve the problems of food and clothing for the poor disabled people as soon as possible.

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