

## Analysis on the Self-development of Poor Women in Rural China

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**Abstract:** China has been striving to alleviate poverty and achieve specific achievements. It also recognizes that poverty alleviation must pay attention to the development of rural poor women. In rural areas, they are a significant force in family and agricultural production, but they cannot cope with various social risks and cost of living. We advocate effectively reducing and eliminating their poverty by introducing a gender perspective in the process of poverty alleviation, meeting gender needs, improving their self-development ability through education and psychological support.

### 1. Introduction

Poverty is a social phenomenon that all countries must face. Alleviating poverty is the ideal of humanity in pursuit of social justice and equality. In the Human Development Report, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) emphasizes gender equality, social participation, women's empowerment and respect for human rights in poverty alleviation. Poverty has a significant female face, and female debt is more likely to evolve and transmit, more dispersed and diverse, more fragile, more concealed<sup>[1]</sup>. In 1978, the American sociologist Pierce proposed that "women are the poorest people in poverty" and since then has the concept of "feminization of poverty"<sup>[2]</sup>.

The connotation of poverty is no longer limited to material poverty, but more emphasis on knowledge poverty, mental poverty, and rights poverty. This is due to the theory of viable capacity of Amartya Sen, a researcher on poverty in the 1990s. Capable ability refers to a person's "possible combination of possible functional activities", while "functional activity" reflects "a variety of things or states that one considers worthwhile to do or achieve"<sup>[3]</sup>. He proposed the concept of capacity poverty, saying that poverty is not a low income, but deprivation of people's basic viable capacity, including equitable access to education, health, market access, security, development opportunities and so on. The content is the lack of access to welfare opportunities and capabilities. The poverty reduction goal of *the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* is not merely to point to income, but to eliminate all forms of poverty and prevent one from falling, especially the fair access to public services such as education and health<sup>[4]</sup>. The essence of poverty is the lack of equal access to material resources and equal access to this ability, i.e., the lack of viable capacity. The poor women especially lack the basic material needs and the ability to cope with various social risks and cost of living. Correspondingly, the path to solving poor women is not only relying on financial input and social relief, but also creating a social environment with an equal opportunity to enhance the ability and quality of the poor, and to avoid and eliminate poverty by rebuilding individual skills and creating opportunities.

China has been striving to alleviate poverty and has come to realize that poverty alleviation must pay attention to the improvement of the self-development ability of the poor. So the government has developed the strategies of targeted poverty alleviation by accurately identifying the poor, using it as a source of poverty alleviation and strength, emphasizing the endogenous poverty alleviation<sup>[5]</sup>. In the process of formulating and implementing poverty alleviation projects, it has been gradually recognized that poverty alleviation must fully consider gender differences, especially the survival and development of rural poor women.

With the urbanization of China, rural women have become the leading force for maintaining

family and agricultural production. However, due to a series of factors such as natural conditions, resource constraints, physiological characteristics, traditional roles and social systems, they are more likely to fall into poverty, not able to get out of poverty and return to poverty even when they get rich. Therefore, it must be recognized that poverty has a gender identity and has a female face<sup>[6]</sup>. Only the situation of poor women in rural areas can be used to improve the ability of self-development and sustainable development to effectively reduce and eliminate their poverty and avoid returning to poverty.

## **2. Analysis of the Importance of Promoting Self-development of Poor Women**

### **2.1 Improve Women's Weak Position and Improve their Quality of Life.**

Both the United Nations Programme of Action and the Millennium Declaration require the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women. The key to combating poverty, hunger and disease and achieving sustainable development<sup>[7]</sup> are recognized. Improving women's weak position and attaching importance to women's self-reliance and rights are emphasized. Rural poor women have engaged in housework and fieldwork, with low quality of life and limited income generation for a long time.

Strengthening the self-development ability of poor women can increase non-agricultural income and give them more economic freedom of control. After getting their financial independence, they are more psychologically confident and more independent in thinking. Their family and social status will upgrade accordingly, and they will get more participation in decision-making. Therefore, the development model of fair use of social resources will lay the necessary foundation for China's stepping into modernization and the world's female anti-poverty project.

### **2.2 Mobilize Women's Human Resources and Increase Poverty Alleviation.**

The advancement of China's industrialization and urbanization and the further opening up have made rural male labourers go out to work in large numbers, and women have become the main force in agricultural production.

If the poor female's cultural level is improved by themselves, they can be more productive when facing changing family planning or encountering risks. Then they can effectively participate in market economy activities to create value. This will promote the rural poverty alleviation work, help to narrow the urban-rural development gap and income gap, accelerate the harmonious and stable development of the countryside, and contribute to the smooth development of the country's targeted poverty alleviation work.

### **2.3 Alleviate the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty and Enhance the Ability of Family Development.**

Intergenerational poverty refers to the vicious transit chain where poverty and the related conditions are transmitted from parents to their children, and then from their children to the children's children when they grow up<sup>[8]</sup>.

Rural women's tending offspring and caring for the family, dominate the future development of housework in the situation that their husbands are working far from home. Their health status, education level, and cultural philosophy influence the enlightenment education and capacity development of the next generation. If we can improve the self-development ability of poor women and improve non-income poverty, they can bring stable economic income channels to families, have the ability and confidence to cope with various family risks and create a good family environment, and use various resources and opportunities to strengthen their children. Education and capacity development break down the intergenerational transmission of poverty and achieve sustainable development by making the descendants grow into healthy and independent individuals.

### **3. Self-development Status of Poor Women in Rural Areas**

#### **3.1 Unstable Living Conditions and Low Personal Economic Income.**

Poor women are mainly engaged in low-value-added agricultural production, which is greatly affected by natural factors. Even if they work for a long time, they will not be able to obtain satisfactory economic returns. Once a large expenditure item is easy to fall into a worse poverty situation. The labour intensity of the fieldwork and the long-time heavy household chores make them have insufficient rest time and them easy to get sick. The lack of economic affluence makes them reluctant to seek professional help, which leads to poor physical condition and in turn, affects their economic income. Although infrastructure such as health and electricity in deprived areas has improved, it takes money to get it, and poor women do not have access to these most basic and healthy living conditions due to low income and instability.

Although the female dominate agricultural production, they are inequitable compared with men in terms of resource possession and dominance. Their family property, land, housing and other resources are still attached to the head of the household. They may lose relevant economic rights at any time due to changes in marital status and fall into a more impoverished state due to the lack of insurance protection.

#### **3.2 Take on Multiple Roles Lack of Time for Self-Development.**

Most of the males in low-income families go out to make a living. In addition to taking on the massive agricultural production and labour roles, women are also responsible for raising children, respecting the elderly, caring for the family, and having no more energy to improve themselves. In the process of targeted poverty alleviation with promoting tourism and ecological precision poverty alleviation projects, the participation of poor women is not high, that is, heavy household chores make them unable to find jobs and gain economic independence. Even if they can enter a simple career path to start a business, they still have a family role and an agricultural production role. What is more noteworthy is that the work given by the family role has not yet been given economic value, so the family status has not been correspondingly improved and thus respected.

#### **3.3 Lack of Gender Awareness and Impairment of the Right to Development.**

The impact of the market economy has led to wealth becoming one of the reference standards for measuring the status of a person or family. This makes the weak female group relatively easy to be abandoned, rejected, lack of social identity, easy to be more inferior, closed or even extreme behaviour or running away from home makes it more difficult for families to get rid of poverty, especially intergenerational poverty.

The rural poor women also have multiple roles at home, bear the burden and do not have perfect medical and endowment security to back up, and the spirit will be more difficult. At home, they often worry about the child's body and study, the health of the elderly, her husband's safety or infidelity, or the depression is caused by domestic violence or even sexual harassment, and family safety is not guaranteed. Once divorced or the other party disregards the family, women's lives tend to fall into a state of poverty and embarrassment.

#### **3.4 Lack of Gender Awareness and Impaired Development Rights.**

Due to the imbalance of development and the lack of education resources, coupled with the weakness of women in the traditional gender structure, rural women's education level is not high and cultural literacy is low. In addition to directly affecting poverty through employment, the level of education also affects poverty indirectly through the number of children and health care<sup>[9]</sup>. Because women cannot tutor their children's homework at home or use new educational concepts and methods to guide their children, thus affecting them and the future development of their families, and putting poverty into a vicious circle.

In the process of poverty alleviation, poor women have little opportunity to participate in vocational education and skills training because they are influenced by factors such as poor social

and cultural practices and the use of gender analysis tools in the male priority family<sup>[10]</sup>. As a result, women's labour skills are single and rough, and it is challenging to realize the development of agricultural modernization. Their ability to start a business and avoid market risks is weak, and subsequent development is difficult. Even if they have the opportunity in participating in some poverty alleviation projects, the jobs that they can apply are gender-oriented. In general, the position and income are very low, and they cannot get better development opportunities and platforms.

#### **4. Countermeasures for Promoting the Development of Rural Poor Women**

##### **4.1 Meeting the Gender Needs of Poor Women and Giving them a Sense of Security.**

In the practice of poverty alleviation, we must focus on the development of local industrial economy, establish local pillar industries, and Let poor women earn income at home without worrying about left-behind children and empty nesters and pass them a sense of control and certainty. It is necessary to measure more than the multiple roles and workloads of poor women, and to break the gender discrimination in the division of labour in traditional concepts so that men have an awareness of sharing household chores.

In addition, while promoting the full coverage and level of social basic medical endowment insurance, the government can consider introducing social resources to provide comprehensive public services in rural communities, establish a comprehensive childcare and retirement institution, solve their worries and ensure that poor women have more time and energy to develop oneself and enhance women's ability to cope with the risk of poverty caused by marital disorder<sup>[11]</sup>. Of course, the government must also formulate reasonable policies to balance the interests of various stakeholders. This is a guarantee for long-term stable development in the future.

##### **4.2 Pay Attention to the Psychological Counselling of Poor Women to Make them Develop Healthily.**

Poor women are either self-regulating or unconsciously turning to their families or even their children when they are in a negative mood. This can make family relationships tense or take the extreme path. Choosing to tell relatives and friends can be relieved to some extent, but non-professional help may be counterproductive.

In the process of targeted poverty alleviation, personnel with certain professional knowledge such as psychology and social work should be recruited to open psychological counselling institutions in poverty alleviation sites to encourage poor women to seek help from psychological counseling agencies bravely. The construction mechanism enables staff to file files for poor women and their children. From the perspective of professional science, they help them to guide negative emotions, effectively prevent psychological barriers and face the difficult and growing problems in poverty alleviation in order to adapt to social development.

##### **4.3 Introduce a Gender Perspective and Use Scientific Tools in the Process of Poverty Alleviation.**

Women are often more diligent, more responsible and responsible than men, and are more willing to improve their families. Therefore, women's independent values should be recognized and women's dominant position should be fully respected. In the top-level design process of poverty alleviation system, it is necessary to improve the recognition of gender elements and enhance their right to speak, benefit, and decision-making. We should make accurate investigation and statistics on the actual situation of poor women, strengthen cooperation with experts and scholars in relevant fields, use multidisciplinary tools to analyze the different poverty situation, participation and ability of poor women, formulate differential poverty alleviation measures, and give them a better development platform.

#### **4.4 Attach Importance to and Invest in Women's Education to Promote the Sustainable Development of Families.**

Theodore Schultz, a well-known American economist and Nobel laureate in economics, believes that economic development depends mainly on the quality of people, not on the abundance of natural resources or the amount of capital stock<sup>[12]</sup>. The Indian educator Karuna Karan believes that "Educate a man and you educate one person; educate a woman and you educate a whole nation."<sup>[13]</sup> Resolving poverty is not just a request for one person, but generations. To achieve sustainable development, we must not only pay attention to the education of girls in rural areas but also invest in the continuing education of poor adult women. The government should set up special funds to attract high-quality educational resources, improve the quality of primary education and teaching, ensure the right of poor girls to education, so that they can get rid of intergenerational poverty through education.

Using resources such as universities, vocational colleges and other institutions to create educational and training networks for adult poor women, such as technical training, management training, popular science training and market culture, so that they can find jobs that can exert their skills and capabilities to get rid of poverty and learn to use multi-party resources to improve their corresponding skills to deal with social risks.

#### **5. Summary**

Along with China's in-depth development of targeted poverty alleviation, the problem of self-development ability of rural poor women has gradually attracted people's attention. However, even after China has eliminated absolute poverty in 2020, the relative poverty of rural women will continue to be accompanied by social development and still face many challenges. Looking forward to the strengthening of global integration, China and other countries can share the experience of women's poverty reduction and jointly promote the development of anti-poverty.

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