



TWO SESSIONS

Editor's Note: During this year's two sessions — the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference — China Daily will publish a series of stories focusing on the achievements the country made in various fields during the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20). They show how the country met its development goals in different fields in the face of numerous challenges.

The rural road out of crushing poverty

Resettlement in modern housing complexes a major factor in changing fortunes of poor farmers

By LI LEI in Beijing
and YANG JUN in Guiyang

Life took a positive turn two years ago for Zhang Yushi, then a poor farmer in hilly Guizhou province, who has hearing problems and difficulty walking.

The watershed moment was when the 39-year-old, his wife Zou Linglian and their two school-age daughters, moved into a sprawling modern resettlement complex.

His new community is near Dajiaochong, a manufacturing neighborhood of Tongren in the northeast of Guizhou, which used to be home to some of China's poorest families.

The new three-bedroom apartment, which was given to Zhang as part of a local poverty relief project, is furnished with a sofa, television and other home appliances. It's a far cry from the crumbling house made of wood and earth that he inherited from his late grandparents who raised him.

Zhang, who now owns a furniture and home appliances store near his apartment that he opened with an interest-free loan arranged by local authorities, said the tile roof of his old home needed constant repairs. "You had to mend the roof regularly or it would leak on rainy days, which are common in the area," he said.

Zhang was among 125,000 people moved closer to schools, hospitals and factories in Tongren as part of a broader effort to curb rural poverty in the region. The Dajiaochong resettlement, the largest of its kind in Tongren, showcases how local authorities moved to enhance settlers' sense of belonging and financial security in their adopted homes, by creating jobs and rolling out community services.

Zhang's resettlement complex is two hours' drive from his isolated family home and has a library, vocational training center, multiple bus services and a school — conveniences he could only dream of not so long ago.

As a farmer's son who barely finished middle school due to strained family finances, Zhang, like most young people in rural Guizhou, toiled in faraway factories for meager pay most of his adult life. Loud construc-



An aerial view of a resettlement community for relocated impoverished families in Tongren, Guizhou province. YANG YING / XINHUA

tion work damaged his hearing. The shortage of jobs near his home sent him to Dongguan, a manufacturing hub in Guangdong province, with his wife and children left behind in order to minimize expenses.

Zhang insisted that his wife rent a room in a nearby town to cook for girls enrolled in a school there.

However, this created extra bills for the family, which was labeled as being impoverished shortly after China intensified poverty relief efforts nine years ago.

Zou, who had stayed with her husband for a short period in Dongguan, said the life of a migrant worker was much harder than she had imagined. "Not much money was left after paying rent, water and electricity bills," the 34-year-old said.

Business booming

Zhang's business has four permanent employees and 20 part-time staff members he can call on during busy periods. He expects to earn 200,000 yuan (\$30,982) in profit this year.

"I cannot be selfish," he said. "I've managed to hold my ground in urban areas and I wish to help more settlers emulate what I have done."

Yang Shengqin moved to a settle-

ment complex in the city's Wanshan district two years ago. She now runs a small factory producing handmade rice noodles, a local specialty, which brings in more than 1,000 yuan a day. Her business blossomed as eateries prospered after the COVID-19 outbreak was brought under control last year.

However, when she first arrived in the district few knew about her noodle-making business. Neighborhood authorities weighed in, helping her forge connections with restaurants in downtown Tongren to bolster sales. Some officials even worked as delivery people to win over customers.

"We have formed partnerships with five restaurants, with each buying about 100 kilograms of rice noodles a day," she said.

"Welfare jobs" have also been rolled out to aid the likes of Wu Gang, a hardworking migrant worker who turned to scavenging seven years ago after the death of his 6-year-old son, which had a deep psychological impact on his wife.

Wu, who moved to a resettlement complex in Yanhe county, Guizhou, two years ago, was spotted by neighborhood authorities.

With a wife and two children to

support, he was given a job as the head of his apartment unit responsible for organizing community events and security. His wife was hired as a cleaner in the residential compound.

"After enjoying the benefits of many policies, I need to make myself useful," he said.

The isolation of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau makes it costly to provide electricity, education and other public services to remote, sparsely populated villages, fueling poverty in Guizhou.

As China increased its rural poverty-alleviation efforts in recent years, Guizhou embraced mass relocation programs to bolster needy farmers' access to healthcare, safe homes, schools and safe drinking water.

More than 465,000 apartments in 949 resettlement complexes have been given to about 1.9 million farmers over the past five years; 1.6 million of them were classified as impoverished based on the country's official definition of poverty. More than 98 percent of settlers said they were content with their new homes, provincial government data showed.

Hundreds of hospitals and schools were either built or upgraded to cope with the surging demand from newcomers, and neighborhood authori-

ties were created to help solve difficulties facing needy families, the government said.

As of November, 884,400 settlers had found jobs through various channels, including "poverty relief factories" set up by authorities to help impoverished farmers. The employment rate among settlers in Guizhou is more than 90 percent, the government said.

Relocation programs were also adopted on a large scale in Yunnan and Gansu provinces and the Ningxia Hui, Guangxi Zhuang and Tibet autonomous regions.

Continuing support

On Feb 25, President Xi Jinping declared a "complete victory" in the nation's fight against poverty through joint efforts. He hailed the achievement of eradicating extreme poverty as a miracle that will "go down in history".

The achievement forms a crucial part of the Communist Party of China's pledge to build the nation into a "moderately prosperous society in all respects" this year, the centenary of the founding of the CPC.

The poverty fight — which has lifted more than 700 million Chinese out of poverty over the past four dec-

ades — aims to bolster rural incomes, as well as infrastructure and the provision of public services in remote and isolated regions.

The end of the poverty relief campaign marks a major shift in China's rural policies from poverty alleviation to stimulating economies in the countryside.

The National Administration for Rural Vitalization was created last month to facilitate the shift, replacing the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, the former top anti-poverty body.

The 9.6 million people resettled across the nation are the most at risk of sliding back into poverty without ongoing support, according to officials.

Hong Tianyun, deputy head of the new administration and a former poverty relief official, said ensuring a smooth transition from poverty alleviation to rural vitalization is the agency's priority.

"Much work remains to be done to help settlers truly settle down," he told a news conference in Beijing on Tuesday. "That includes tasks to develop local industry, employment, public services, social governance and social integration."

Zhang Xiaohong, vice-minister of housing, said his office will step up surveillance at resettlement communities to ensure home safety.

He also promised that the ministry will monitor low-income families to determine whether they need assistance with home repairs or even relocation. "No gaps in our work, no gaps in our policies," he said at the event.

Ou Yunhua, a settler at the Wanba resettlement site in Tongren, now works as a caregiver at a nursing home. Her husband Zhang Taiyou does casual jobs in the neighborhood. "The Party's policy is good," said 51-year-old Ou. "The Party has not only offered us shelter but also given us jobs. Though we do not earn much, it's already a dream life for us."

Zhao Yandi contributed to this story.

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