

Accurate Poverty Targeting in China

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FOREWORD

This report is the result of a collaboration between Xiaolin Wang, Fudan University, colleagues in the International Poverty Reduction Centre in China (IPRCC) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. OPHI is grateful to Xiaolin Wang and the IPRCC for collectively facilitating the research, as well as for sharing their information, insights and comments.

This briefing was prepared in response to demand from a number of partners in the multidimensional poverty peer network (MPPN) for insights from China's poverty

reduction activities that might be applicable to other countries also seeking to address multidimensional poverty using household-level targeting and cash-plus social protection packages that match the deprivations each household experiences. We are deeply grateful to all concerned for their time, commitment, and sharing of experience.



Felipe Roa-Clavijo | OPHI

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I. INTRODUCTION

This study describes China's 'Accurate Poverty Targeting', the individual-level component of anti-poverty programmes that sought to end absolute and extreme poverty in China by 2020. The study focuses on the roles that both monetary and multidimensional indicators played in targeting and intervention design and how the policies of China interacted with their multidimensional poverty measures.

Building on their significant progress in reducing monetary poverty, the Government of China set a target of ending poverty by 2020 and moved beyond income to aim for Xiao Kang Society.² Xiao Kang Society – which roughly translates as 'moderately prosperous society' – required the improvement of people's living standards in multiple dimensions. For example, every child should be able to access nine years of compulsory schooling, basic health care services, and basic minimum guaranteed income, and every village should have access to rural roads of high quality, drinking water, and other basic public goods and services.

To meet the targets for Xiao Kang Society, special attention needed to be placed on the poorest so that no one was left behind. Initial investments were focused on 832 poor counties (Sharpe, 2011). Next, attention was focused on poor villages located in either poor or non-poor counties. In the phase described in this study, household interventions were targeted at poor people, wherever they resided.³

In the targets of Xiao Kang Society, the priority of ending poverty by 2020 had a clear three-part definition: (1) using interlocking anti-poverty programmes to end income poverty, (2) freeing poor people of two worries (food and clothing), and (3) providing three guaranteed services (education, health care, and housing) (China Daily, 2019, see Box 1).

This study provides an overview of China's anti-poverty programmes and then focuses on the 'Accurate Poverty Targeting' component, especially those aspects that may be of interest to policymakers who are interested to learn how China organised its poverty reduction efforts, and adapt them for their own contexts. This study makes no attempt to provide a complete overview much less evaluation of poverty reduction efforts in China. It is strictly limited in scope, and shares a set of concrete positive lessons from certain contexts within China that may be of interest to those planning poverty reduction interventions in other countries and contexts. It closes with a selection of interview-based case studies of people who have interacted with the poverty alleviation programmes following field work undertaken between 2016 and 2017.

BOX 1. ENDING POVERTY IN CHINA ACCORDING TO XIAO KANG SOCIETY (PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA, 2010)

'Ending poverty' means:

1. End income poverty
2. Free people from two worries:
 - a. Food
 - b. Clothing
3. Guarantee three services:
 - a. Education
 - b. Healthcare
 - c. Housing

1.1 BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

1.1.1 Etymology of the Word 'Poverty' in Chinese

Before sketching the historical development of anti-poverty policies at county, village, and individual levels, it may be useful to introduce an etymological observation: the literal meaning of the word 'poverty' (pin kun) in Chinese is inherently multidimensional (see also Alkire and Shen, 2017, p. 163). Wang (2012) clarifies how the etymology of the word 'poverty' in Chinese provides a natural launching pad for a multidimensional understanding of poverty. Wang observes that the word for poverty in Chinese is made of two characters 贫困 pronounced 'pin kun'. The Xinhua Dictionary defines 'poor' (贫, pin) as 'little income and difficulties in life' and defines 'predicament' (困, kun) as 'falling into a harsh environment or any environment that one cannot shake off'.⁴ Thus, 'pin' mainly refers to the lack of income and 'kun' emphasizes

the other dimensions. So, according to the Chinese definition, 'poverty' can be defined as 'falling into a harsh environment or any environment that one cannot shake off, and having little income or wealth' (Wang, 2012).

1.1.2 History of Poverty Interventions at the County and Village Levels 1986–2010

The distribution of poor people in China has changed dramatically since reforms that began in 1978 (Remenyi, 2003). Using the World Bank's poverty line, almost 800 million poor people exited from extreme monetary poverty in 35 years. In the 1980s, governments at various levels across China began sending officials and volunteers to help poverty-stricken counties and villages formulated development plans and projects.

During the first phase, China's county-level anti-poverty programmes already had a multidimensional aspect.

BOX 2. LIANHUA VILLAGE, HUAJIANG TOWN, IN GUIZHOU PROVINCE

An example of how these programmes influenced the villages themselves is the case of Lianhua Village, Huajiang Town, in Guizhou Province. Located in Guanling Bouyei and Miao Autonomous County about 300 kilometres southeast of Guiyang (the capital of Guizhou Province) the village encompasses 19.5 square kilometres with a total population of 2,633, including 873 people who worked as migrant workers elsewhere. The village grew cereals on its 285 hectares of farmlands (Wang, 2016).

Based on China's 'pairing assistance' poverty relief system – a system that links government departments and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) with specific poverty-stricken villages – a Poverty Relief Team was sent to Lianhua Village in 2011. The team was headed by Zhou Qibing, a former official of the Immigration Bureau of Anshun City, Guizhou, the 'pairing assistant' to the village. When the team arrived in the village, it discovered three major problems that made it difficult to eradicate poverty: a lack of funds for initial investments to switch to cash crops; a lack of distribution channels because of poor transportation infrastructure; and a lack of a cooperative union between the farmers. Lianhua's soil was much more suitable for cash crops, considering the rocky desertification of nearly 540 square kilometres of Guanling County's territory, which includes Lianhua Village. Without funds to invest in new technology, however, switching to cash crops was impossible. Therefore, the first solution Zhou implemented was to apply for funds from local agricultural authorities to support the switch to cash crop farming. He also helped raise funds to rebuild the road that connected the village to a nearby expressway, allowing villagers to connect to the outside market. Under Zhou's supervision, the village also established a farmers' union, which ensured that profits were distributed as income to poor households as well as to investors. Lianhua Village ended poverty after a period of five years (Wang, 2016). Although only a small number of Village Relief Teams achieved such rapid success, the case of Lianhua Village serves as an example of how the VDPs could work on the ground.

Poverty-stricken counties were identified as the basic unit for anti-poverty programmes. Almost all poverty policies involved budget transfers to facilitate poor areas' economic growth and social development, e.g. to construct highways, rural roads, and irrigation systems, and to deliver basic education and health care systems, as well as reduce monetary poverty.

Between 2001 and 2010, the government developed a dual approach to poverty targeting (Sharpe, 2011). One pillar still used the county-targeting approach. The new pillar identified poor villages and provided extra support and resources to them. In 2001, China's State Council Leading Group Office for Poverty Alleviation and Development designated 148,000 villages as impoverished and formulated poverty reduction programmes for each village.⁵ The programmes attempted to tackle the issues of inadequate farmland, a lack of adequate drinking water for people and livestock, a lack of roads and infrastructure, and the low incomes of poor villagers, as well as providing better social platforms within the villages. These programmes – referred to as Village Development Programmes (VDP) – were part of the Development-Oriented Poverty Reduction Programme for Rural China (2001–2010).⁶ They pooled and allocated funds on a yearly basis with the goal of increasing income, upgrading infrastructure, developing public welfare, and improving production and living standards in the designated villages. By the end of 2010, about 126,000 villages had implemented the programmes (Information Office of the State Council, 2011, see Box 2).

II. THE DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN OF 'ACCURATE POVERTY TARGETING'

By 2010, success in income poverty reduction was evident (People's Republic of China, 2010). For example, China's poverty-stricken rural population decreased from 94.22 million at the end of 2000 to 26.88 million at the end of 2010 – a decrease from 10.2% in 2000 to 2.8% in 2010 (Information Office of the State Council, 2011). Even in the poor villages, the incidence of poverty was less than 30%.⁷ Given this distribution of poverty, if the government's anti-poverty policies continued unchanged, their efficiency would diminish. To go the last kilometre meant that the Chinese government had to identify the poor households one by one.

In 2012, the Central Government and Leading Group on Poverty (LGOP) decided to launch the programme called 'precise' or 'accurate' poverty targeting. This required identifying each poor household and poor village in China, collecting household and village data, and designing policy responses that were tailored to the particular profile of deprivations that each household experienced.

The 'Accurate Poverty Targeting' strategy directly targeted poor counties, poor villages, and poor households. Building on this, the Outline for Development-oriented Poverty Reduction in China (2011–2020) produced by the Central Government, defined what it would mean to end poverty. As before, it defined three components and elaborated further. Not being poor meant:

1. **Coming out of Income Poverty:** The consumption per capita must exceed 2,300 RMB per person per year – which is higher than the monetary poverty line (Pingping et al. 2015).
2. **Ending Two Worries:** Each person needs to have their basic needs met. While these may seem very similar to the monetary poverty line, money is a means, whereas guaranteed food and clothing is an end. The basic needs are *Enough Food and Enough Clothing*.
3. **Enjoying Three Guarantees:** Three dimensions are guaranteed for each household, and it must be verified that each household actually enjoys these guaranteed services: (a) *Basic Education* – completing nine years of compulsory schooling, (b) *Basic Health Services* – each person must have medical insurance and be able to access necessary medical care, and (c) *Housing Security* – the structure of the house has to be safe.

Thus, China employed a union-based multidimensional approach to measure whether poor households have ended poverty. If a poor household fulfilled all these targets, it meant that poor people had graduated out of poverty and entered the Xiao Kang Society.

2.1 ACHIEVEMENTS OF 'ACCURATE POVERTY TARGETING' IN CHINA 2012–2019

'Accurate Poverty Targeting' has been described as having the following five outcomes.

1. The number of people living in poverty decreased from 98.99 million at the end of 2012 to 5.51 million at the end of 2019. The incidence of poverty dropped from 10.2% to 0.6%, with more than 10 million poor people lifted out of poverty each year for seven consecutive years. In February 2021, all 832 counties had been lifted out of poverty.⁸

2. The incomes of poor people rose substantially. From 2013 to 2019, the per capita disposable income of farmers in 832 poor counties increased from 6,079 yuan to 11,567 yuan, an average annual growth rate of 9.7%, 2.2 percentage points higher than the overall national rate for the same period. The per capita net income of registered poor households nationwide increased from 3,416 yuan in 2015 to 9,808 yuan in 2019, with an average annual growth rate of 30.2%.⁹

3. Basic working and living conditions in poor areas were said to have improved significantly. All qualified administrative villages built tarmacked roads, and access to clinics and doctors. The conditions of 108,000 schools with weak compulsory education were improved. The reliabil-

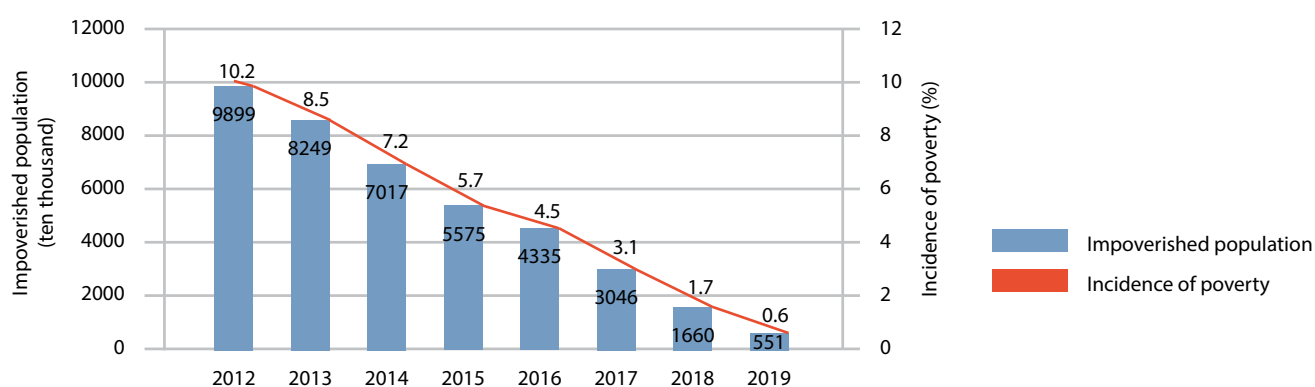
ity rate of the rural power supply network reached 99%, and 98% of poor villages in the extremely impoverished areas obtained broadband access.

4. The broader economic and social development of poor areas were reported to have been accelerated. With the continuous growth of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors industries, e-commerce, solar panel construction, and tourism, poverty alleviation developed rapidly, and the economic vitality and development potential of poor areas was enhanced. Thanks to poverty alleviation through ecological development and conversion of farmland to forests and grassland, the ecological environment in poor areas was reported to have significantly improved.

5. Human capital to tackle poverty increased. Officials working at the primary level were considered to have significantly improved their skill at poverty identification and targeted assistance. A total of 255,000 resident working teams in villages were dispatched across the country, and more than 2.9 million cadres of the Party and government organizations and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) and institutions at or above the county level were selected to serve as first secretaries or resident cadres in poor villages. In late 2019, 918,000 were on duty. Through this programme young cadres in particular learned about the grassroots work with poor households.¹⁰

We now turn to examine more closely the strategies by which multidimensional poverty data and measurement informed policies using 'Accurate Poverty Targeting'.

Figure 1. Decrease of Incidence of Poverty among the Rural Poor Population, 2012–2019



Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2019.

2.2 TARGETING THE POOR AND INVESTING IN POVERTY REDUCTION

In 2014, the Government of China identified 70 million people who were still living in multidimensional poverty which was 7.2% of the population. It aimed to reduce this to zero within six short years – by 2020. In order to meet this ambitious target, statistics were intensively collected and analysed each year and used to track progress as well as to shape interventions and action. Table 1 shows the national reduction in poverty 2014 to 2016, in which 27 million people exited poverty.

2.2.1 Identification of Multidimensionally Poor Households

In 2014, in order to apply the new anti-poverty programmes, relevant data from households were collected, analysed, and used to identify who was poor and to develop a policy proposal for the Central Government. On the basis of this evidence, the Central Government further developed the national anti-poverty strategy in the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020, see Box 3).

How did the targeting work? Poverty targeting data was collected based on a union version of the measurement

Table 1. The Poverty Rate and Number of Poor People, 2014–2016

	Number of poor people (million)	Poverty headcount ratio (%)
2014	70.17	7.2
2015	55.75	5.7
2016	43.35	4.5

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2016).

BOX 3. 13th FIVE-YEAR PLAN (2016–2020)

Many countries include poverty reduction (monetary and multidimensional) in their national development plans; this section describes China's 13th Five-Year Plan. The 13th Five-Year Plan (2016–2020) sought to coordinate efforts to achieve economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological progress towards achieving a moderately prosperous society – Xiao Kang Society (People's Republic of China, 2016).

The objectives of the 13th Five-Year Plan National Plan were to maintain a medium-high rate of economic growth, create innovation-driven development, ensure coordinated development, improve standards of living, human capital and quality of life, improve the quality of the environment and of ecosystems, and strengthen institutions.

Part XIII of the Five-Year Plan outlines 'the fight against poverty'. The goal was to enable 50 million people – the number who were still identified as poor at the start of 2016 – to exit poverty by 2020. The plan highlighted the implementation of targeted poverty reduction measures:

We will adopt categorized, targeted poverty alleviation measures that are focused on addressing the causes of poverty and providing the support needed to ensure its alleviation (People's Republic of China, 2016:155).

The targeted poverty measures included the identification and registration of who is poor, establishing records for targeted poverty, household assessments, monitoring and dynamic management to ensure records are updated regularly. The plan also encouraged better coordination between different levels of government, more financial investment, and greater participation of all levels of society.

approach known as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) (Alkire and Foster 2011). In 2014, household-level questionnaires containing a total of 49 indicators were used. Subsequently, local governments expanded the questionnaire.

Enumerators in different provinces reported that the income component of the survey was challenging to collect accurately. In rural areas, it proved difficult for the people in the village, and for the local government officers, to clearly calculate the incomes of poor households. This was challenging for a number of reasons: most poor people were employed in the informal sector; many worked outside the community; some sold agricultural products by themselves. There were also no tax collection systems or administrative records to cross-check. At the grassroots or community level, it proved more accurate to measure the living standards and assets of the household. As a result, non-income dimensions were primarily used to identify people living in poverty.

In China, multidimensional poverty targeting uses a union approach. If one child is not in compulsory schooling, the household is identified as poor even if household per capita income exceeds the national poverty line. Similarly, if the household is lacking any of the ‘two no-worries’ or ‘three guarantees’, it is identified as poor and can receive the relevant benefits.

A union approach was adopted because it was easy to understand and apply. It was relevant because each of the in-

dicators used are very basic attributes that are universally sought. The Multidimensional Poverty Index catalogues each and every deprivation of each household according to the 1-2-3 structure explained above, which means it can identify the poorest persons and regions – those who experience the most deprivations at a time.

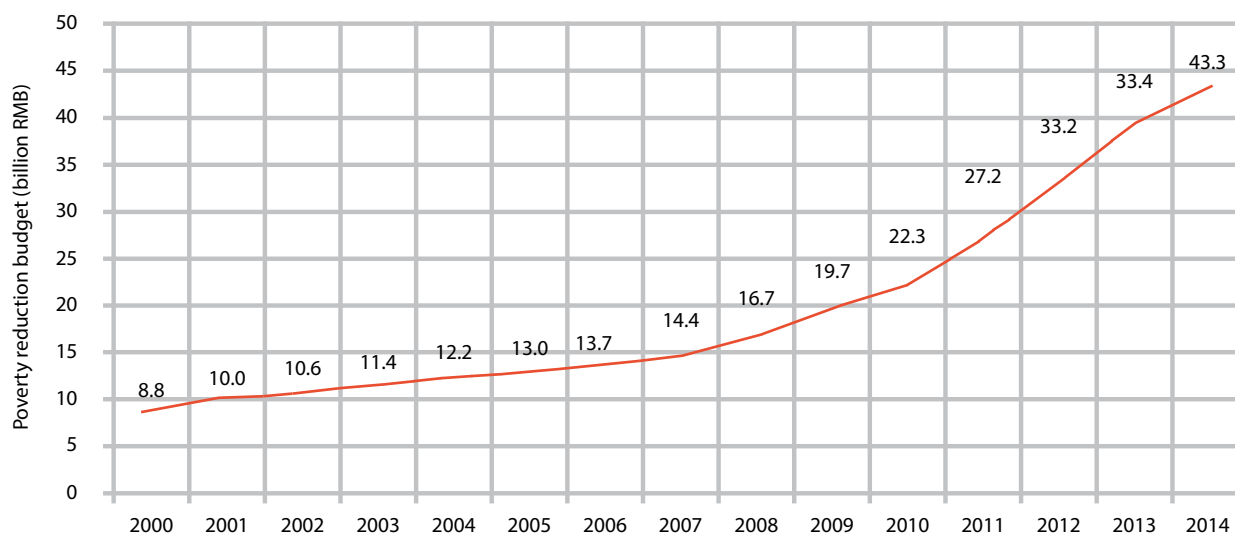
While provincial practices vary, one feature of poverty reduction was its reliance on data. For example, many villages have a ‘Poverty Board’. The Poverty Board provides the population (persons and households) of the village and the number of households and individuals that were poor when the poverty programme was set up. The columns for each poor household show their specific deprivations, the year of expected exit from poverty, and the size of the household.

2.2.2 Investment in Poverty Reduction: Finances and Human Resources

Achieving the goal of ending poverty by 2020 required a significant financial investment. As Figure 2 shows, the Central Government increased the poverty reduction budget steadily, with sharp increases evident since 2011, when the ‘National Programme for Rural Poverty Alleviation (2011–2020)’ was issued.

Prior to 2000, the Central Fiscal Fund on Poverty Reduction included the National Development Fund, the Fund of Cash for Work Programmes, the Fund for Minority Ethnic Groups, and the Fund for San Xi (三西)

Figure 2. Central Fiscal Fund on Poverty Reduction (2000–2014, billion RMB)



Source: Yearbook of China's Poverty Alleviation and Development (2015).



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Programmes. Since 2001, the Central Fiscal Fund on Poverty Reduction has included the additional resources of a Subsidized Loan from Central Finance, the Special Fund for Poor State-Owned Farms, the Special Fund for Poor State-Owned Forest Farms, among others.

In addition to a steep increase in financial investment, the Central Government expanded the pool of officials employed to end poverty. To increase the human resources in poor villages, 500,000 government officials were deployed to 100,000 poor villages. Their job as First Secretaries was to assist the village-level government (Xinhua, 2017).

2.3 INTERVENTIONS USING MULTIDIMENSIONAL DATA TO INFORM INTEGRATED ANTI-POVERTY PROGRAMMES

Another way in which ‘Accurate Poverty Targeting’ was more ‘precise’ was that new interventions were tailored to the common deprivation profiles of households.

The Central Government developed eight policies to address what were considered the root causes of the most common deprivations:

1. **Enterprise-based Policy:** This policy was designed to benefit rural poor people by improving labour prospects. The policy took many forms. For example, the government might support and mobilize a ‘dragon handle’ enterprise that links poor households with the market. Other projects brought poor households together to develop and market high quality agricultural products – tea, rice, local herbs, and so on. Some areas encouraged rural cooperatives to form to have power to bargain with the market. Poor individuals could gain access to small micro-finance grants. Larger financial support was possible – such as three-loans of 50,000 RMB for agricultural industry which carried a subsidized interest rate and did not require a guarantee.
2. **Employment Policy:** This policy was designed for poor people who travel to urban areas or factories for employment outside of their own province. These workers were provided training support and employment information to improve their job prospects and earnings.

3. **Urbanisation Anti-Poverty Policy:** This policy was designed to move poor people in environmentally fragile territories, for example in northern areas, to urban areas. Over a five year-period, about 10 million people migrated to urban areas, with some receiving support such as government subsidies to purchase accommodation.
4. **Education Policy:** Both rural and urban areas require students to complete middle school: that is, to attend school for nine years. After that, education is optional, and parents pay. But the 832 poverty-stricken counties instituted a 9+3 compulsory education system. After 9 years, when children graduate from middle school, they could receive free vocational education for an additional three years. In the poorest of the 832 counties, a 3+9+3 education strategy was followed, which included preschool. Households with students received a cash transfer and could access interest-free educational loans. In this way, the education policy sought to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty.
5. **Healthcare Policy:** All households (poor and non-poor) could access new rural medical cooperative insurance (RMC). Every year, people paid a small amount to buy the insurance, but if they were hospitalized, they could claim back about 60% of their expenditure. Commercial insurance was also available for poor households with especially vulnerable members. This helps them cover about 80% of health system costs. Government relief and non-government organisations' relief could be made available in some locations.
6. **Ecological Job Creation Policy:** China's anti-poverty policies were developed as the 2030 Development Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals were being agreed upon internationally. To further both agendas, poor families could be employed to undertake ecological work such as planting or watering trees that beautify communities and cleanse the environment.
7. **Monetary Transfers Policy:** If the anti-poverty policies described above were not sufficient to support poor people and take them out of poverty, then they receive *di bao*. That is, one or more household members received a low-level cash transfer to ensure their income is above the national poverty line. *Di bao* is a Civil Affairs' programme.¹¹ It covers those

households with illness, disabilities, pensioners, and those who cannot work or who are living in harsh conditions. The *di bao* system is dynamically managed; records were updated monthly to provide whoever meets the requirements with a subsidy and to monitor those who no longer fit the requirements – a mechanism that offers support yet avoids creating welfare dependency.

Alongside these policies, a policy on evaluation and appraisal helped the institutions and systems to learn and to self-correct.

8. **Evaluation and Assessment Appraisal System Policy:** In 2016 China launched its largest third-party evaluation system. The evaluation covered not only grassroots-level work but also leadership, such as the provincial-level community party secretary and the provincial government. Every year around 0.1% of poor households are randomly sampled for third-party evaluation. According to this evaluation, the Central Government is held accountable to the local government. This policy helps support the Central Government's policy by focusing on implementation and identifying where inaccuracies may arise.

2.4 MANAGEMENT AND 'ACCURATE POVERTY TARGETING'

The challenge of enabling 70 million people to exit multidimensional poverty by 2020 using individual household data and multiple sectoral policies required clear management coordination across sectors and levels of government. This coordination exercise is of tremendous interest in the era of the SDGs given the evident power of integrated and multisectoral approaches, even if the institutional capacity may not be present in other countries to replicate it immediately.¹²

Recall that China identifies poor households individually and provides tailored policy supports so poor households can leave poverty. The LGOP is the central institution overseeing China's anti-poverty strategy and coordinates 47 different ministries and organisations. Because synchronisation requires a clear institutional infrastructure, the LGOP structure is the same at provincial, prefecture, and county levels.

2.4.1 Responsibilities of the LGOP

The Leading Group on Poverty (LGOP) is responsible for coordinating and overseeing the reduction of poverty across China. The main duties of the LGOP are:

1. Drafting the laws, regulations, policies, and plans for national poverty alleviation.
2. Examining and approving the distribution plan for the national poverty alleviation budget.
3. Studying and researching poverty reduction and carrying out evaluations for different projects and their administration.
4. Coordinating and solving the significant issues of poverty alleviation practices.
5. Studying and guiding the national poverty alleviation work.
6. Designing the top-level and large-scale poverty reduction policies.

2.4.2 Budgetary Flows

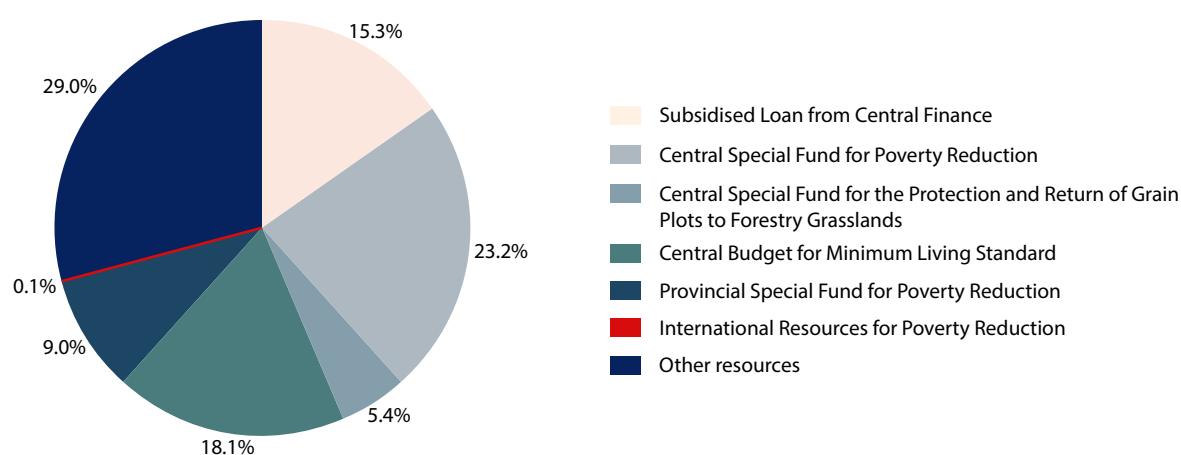
A key factor in the institutionalization of China's anti-poverty policy concerns budgetary flows. Article 5 of Decisions of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and The State Council on Winning the Tough Battle Against Poverty, states that the government

will continue to play a key role in collecting and allocating financial resources, including direct payments, special transfer payments, loans, and other resources (Figure 3). The Central Government and CPC committee promised to improve financial support for poverty alleviation. The Central Finance Office would continue to provide transfer payments to poor areas. A certain proportion of agriculture-related funds, including comprehensive agricultural development and reform transfer payments, were allocated giving priority to poor areas and places. Allocations were based on the provincial-level fiscal expenditure structure to correspond to local poverty alleviation requirements, with an expectation that there would be a genuine increase in expenditure on poverty alleviation.

The budget flows from the Ministry of Finance to county governments. The county-level government is responsible for the funds' approval and exact allocation. This policy gives the county government more flexibility and power in project design and decision-making. However, their increased power also means that the county government must take more responsibility in managing the budget in line with the poverty strategy.

To provide a concrete example, in 2015, all county-level governments received 190.26 billion RMB, which is the total size of the budget reflected in Figure 3. As Table 2

Figure 3. The Types of Government Resources Used to Reduce Poverty



Source: Poverty Monitoring Report of Rural China (2016).

Table 2. The Financial Contribution towards Poverty Reduction for Counties in Poor Areas in RMB

	2014 (Billion)	2015 (Billion)	Increase %
Subsidised Loan	15.33	29.02	89.3
Central Special Fund for Poverty Reduction	37.90	44.10	16.4
Central Special Fund for Protection and Return of Grain Plots to Forestry and Grassland	6.67	10.23	53.4
Central Budget for Minimum Living Standard Guarantee System (<i>di Bao</i>)	26.37	34.40	30.5
The Provincial Special Fund for Poverty Reduction	12.52	17.13	36.9
International Resources for Poverty Reduction	0.36	0.21	-42.7
Other Resources	42.95	55.17	28.4

Source: Poverty Monitoring Report of Rural China (2016).

shows, these resources that were made available for poverty alleviation showed a massive increase of 35.6% in domestic resources compared to the previous year.

2.4.3 Coordination across Levels of Government

The Leading Group on Poverty (LGOP) is the leading actor in poverty alleviation in China. Its membership includes more than 40 Ministries of the council, such as the Ministries of Agriculture and Finance (Annex 1). Each Director General or Deputy Director General (DDG) (most representatives are DDGs of different Ministries) are members of the State Council Leading Group Office for Poverty Alleviation and Development. The Leading Group has met at least once a month since 2014. The frequency of meetings again illustrates the high priority accorded to poverty reduction.

This way of organising and managing the Leading Group is similar across provincial, autonomous regions, city, and county levels. Most township governments do not have LGOP structures, but rather have assigned officers to work in township-level LGOP stations. Each level of government has its own LGOP to guide and plan local action plans for poverty alleviation. The Chair of the Leading Office at different local levels is the Secretary or Deputy Secretary of the Party Committee. Each level of the Leading Office has responsibility for advancing the poverty reduction plan according to the guidelines coming from the central LGOP Office.

The tasks for poverty alleviation are divided among different levels of governments. In general, the State Council Leading Group Office for Poverty Alleviation and Development is responsible for planning, monitoring, evaluation, and resource coordination (Figure 4). The provincial-level Leading Group is largely responsible for practices of poverty alleviation, and the County's Leading Office is the main implementing actor. Central financing goes directly to provincial offices at the beginning of the year. The right to allocate and utilise the central budget belongs to provincial governments. Meanwhile, the provincial government is accountable for its success in the tasks of provincial poverty alleviation and financial allocation.

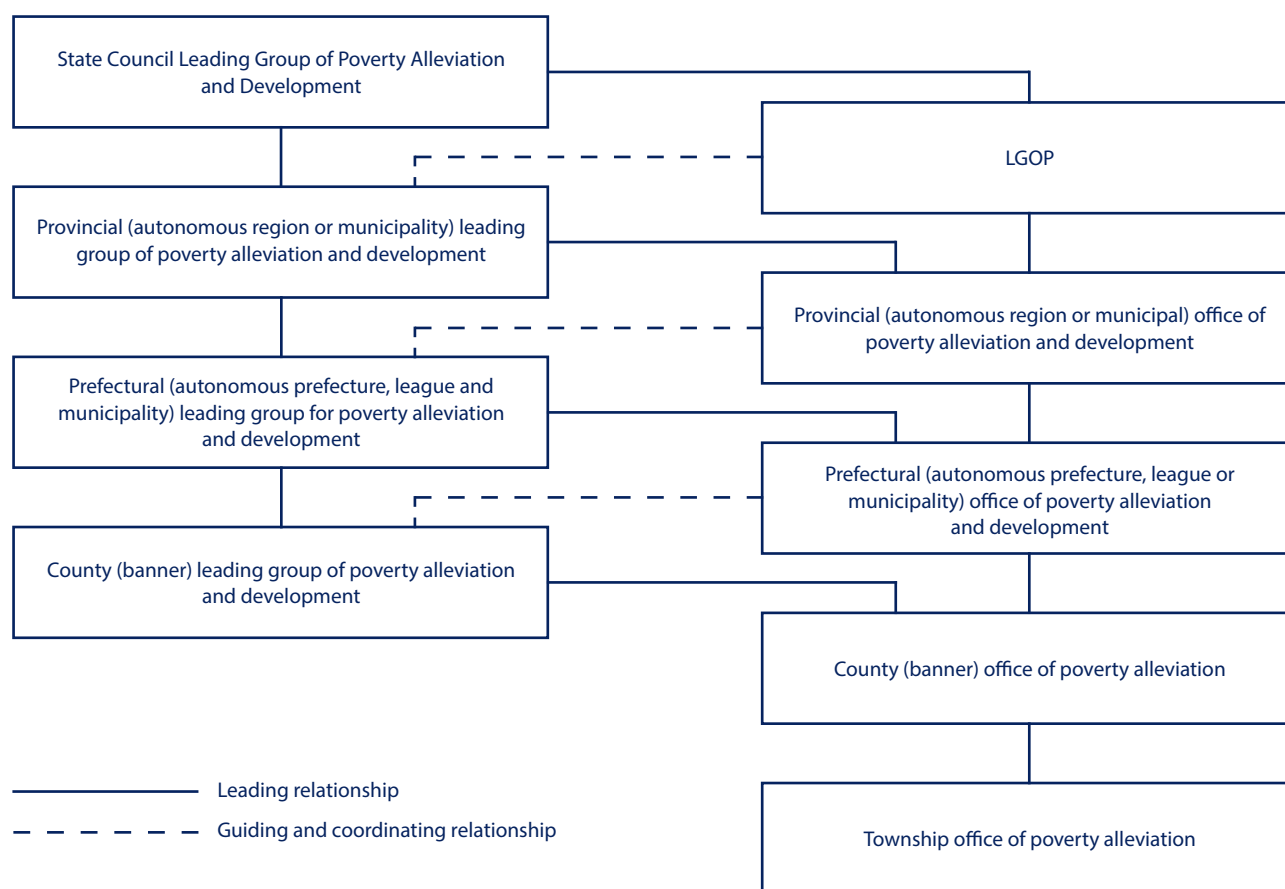
2.4.4 Key Performance Indicators on Poverty Alleviation

Top performing institutions require clear performance indicators, timelines and standards. In 2016, the General Office of the CPC Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council published the Appraisal Measures for the Provincial CPC Committees and Governments' Poverty Alleviation and Development Performance (Wang & Zhang, 2020). These measures apply to the appraisal of poverty alleviation and development performance in the 22 provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities) that have 'Accurate Poverty Targeting'.

The appraisal includes the following four indicators:

1. **Poverty alleviation performance.** This refers to a reduction in the number of registered poor residents, the graduation of poor counties out of poverty, and increases in rural resident income in impoverished areas.

Figure 4. The Framework of China's Poverty Alleviation across Levels of Government



Source: State Council Leading Group Office for Poverty Alleviation and Development (2020).

2. **Identification.** This measures the targeting accuracy with respect to the registered poor population and the number of poor people rising out of poverty.
3. **Precisely targeted assistance and support.** This focuses on the success level of the in-village task group and the work of the people responsible for providing assistance and support.
4. **Poverty alleviation fund.** According to the appraisal measure adopted for performance of national special financial poverty alleviation funds, this indicator focuses on allocation, utilization, supervision, and effectiveness of the use of funds in all provinces.

The performance indicators provide feedback to lower levels of government as to how well they performed with respect to achieving the agreed target of ending poverty by 2020 and can also be used to pinpoint areas for improvement.

2.5 GRADUATION OF POOR PEOPLE, VILLAGES, AND COUNTIES

In order to attempt to end multidimensional poverty by 2020, it was necessary both to have a clear method of identifying who is poor (described above) and also clear criteria by which to assess whether a household or village has graduated from poverty.

Graduation of Poor Households: For households, the graduation assessment was as follows. The annual income of each member should be above poverty line levels for more than two years. Furthermore, the household should have no worries about 'food and clothing', should be covered by basic health care, should benefit from compulsory education, and should live in a safe house. In practice, if a household appeared to have graduated out of poverty, this change would be noted in the village meeting. After verification by the village management office, village

CPC office, and the in-village task team, and after publishing this information in the village for seven days, this poor household was recognized as a non-poor household.

Graduation of Poor Villages: The graduation of villages out of poverty required the village's poverty headcount ratio (the proportion of people living in poverty) to be less than 2% (in poorer Western provinces, below 3%) and, secondarily, the village must have sufficient infrastructure, public health, industry development, and budget. If these were verified by the township LGOP, the poor village was graduated.

Graduation of Poor Counties: For counties to be considered non-poor, the poverty headcount ratio must not exceed 2% in general and 3% in poorer Western counties. To authorise the graduation, the County LGOP should begin the process by applying for graduation, then the City Leading Group will send an evaluation group to check, and the evaluation report will be sent to the Provincial LGOP for further verification. The Provincial LGOP was then to publish the graduated counties list on the web or other public areas, and, if no objections are raised, the graduated poor counties list was to be reported to the State LGOP.

The four policy actions described in this section shape the current generation of precise poverty reduction interventions in China that reach 'the last kilometre' to end poverty by 2020.

2.6 AN INNOVATIVE ASPECT: THE CONTACT PERSON

Along with the targeted poverty alleviation policies, the Central Government designed a parallel structure to provide additional support to the targeted poor households. The system is called 'the Contact Person', and it consists of assigning three to ten poor households to public officials from agencies across all government levels (not necessarily from poverty alleviation programmes). The Contact Person is an additional support system for poor households that seeks to double poverty alleviation efforts by connecting public officials and poor households. The poor households know their Contact Person's telephone number and designation.

As a Contact Person, a public official's main goal is to support poor households to increase the pace of their poverty alleviation. As a third party involved in the poverty alleviation process (the first being poor families and the second being the LGOP village team structure), Contact Persons ensure poor families are connected with poverty alleviation interventions, but if required may help the family in different and innovative ways to exit poverty. This could include providing support for agriculture, market access, or technology.

The Contact Person is required to visit their assigned poor households regularly to follow up on progress in leaving poverty. Their individual professional careers depend in part on whether these families move out of poverty which serves as an incentivising mechanism for regular monitoring and problem-solving. This provides a motivated back-up system for constant monitoring and problem-solving.

III. POVERTY REDUCTION IN PRACTICE: CASE STUDIES

A joint team from the International Poverty Reduction Center in China (IPRCC) and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI) conducted fieldwork in Inner Mongolia and Guizhou province in 2016 and 2017 to examine how ‘Accurate Poverty Targeting’ programming worked in practice on the ground and to further examine the role of the Contact Person in the villages visited.

3.1 INNER MONGOLIA CASE STUDY

Chifeng Municipality is in southeastern Inner Mongolia. It has a total area of over 90,000 square kilometres and a population of almost 4.6 million inhabitants.¹³ As of 2016, ten of the 12 counties in Chifeng were considered ‘poor counties’, including Wang Niu Te County. All four villages visited in this study had experienced very strong poverty reduction between the years of 2014 and 2016. In Hu Ai Yin Le, the number of households categorized as poor diminished from 144 to 20 over those two years.

In Xing Long Di, there were 793 poor people in 2014 and only 474 in 2016. In Wu Lan Ji Da Gai, there were 131 households (378 people) categorized as poor in 2014 and 47 households (124 people) categorized as poor in 2016. Finally, in Wu Lan Au Du, the number of poor households fell from 245 (564 people) in 2014 to 105 (243 people) in 2016.

3.1.1. How people were identified as poor

From 2014, the government in Inner Mongolia used ‘Accurate Poverty Targeting’ to identify poor people and implement interventions that more effectively reduced poverty. They targeted people who lacked education, people who were sick or otherwise had inadequate health or lacked health insurance, people with low incomes, people without sufficient work, and people with poor housing conditions.

To be categorized as poor – and thus eligible for the benefits of the poverty reduction interventions – a person first completes an application. These applications are then evaluated at a county-wide meeting of poverty reduction



Information bulletin board at local field office

workers who select the accepted applications and send the names of those who were successful back to the villages. These names are given to local poverty officers and made public to get feedback on any changes needed. If there are no changes requested to this list, the names are sent back to the county, which confirms the names as people eligible to receive the interventions. Most of this identification and targeting process was completed in 2014.

3.1.2. What interventions were responsible for the accelerated reduction of poverty?

The poverty reduction programme included a number of individual-level and community-level interventions designed to facilitate a household's move out of poverty. It also had a 'relational' component, with two layers of civil servants helping to ensure that no household was overlooked.

Individual-level interventions included improved housing, house insurance, a scaled pension, health insurance, compulsory education, and income support. Community-level

interventions also included community grants and sector-specific poverty reduction grants.

The improved housing interventions provided poor households with housing with adequate floors, walls, and heating. Housing insurance protects this asset from destruction from natural disasters and other calamities, enabling a more sustained graduation from poverty. As of 2016, the scaled pension was set at 65 RMB/month for poor persons aged 60–70, 70 RMB/month for poor persons aged 70–80, and 100 RMB/month for persons aged over 80. The health insurance provided by the intervention covers 70% of all health insurance costs. Education is compulsory up to grade nine.

The income support intervention, or *di bao*, is a minimum guaranteed income set by local government. It is one of the largest targeted transfer schemes in the world.¹⁴ Prior to 2015, the *di bao* standard for Inner Mongolia was 1800 RMB per year, which was raised to 2500 RMB per year in 2015. After a poor person graduates out of poverty



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ty and is declared non-poor in terms of income, they still receive *di bao* for five years, to help ensure that the impact is sustained.

In terms of relationship interventions, each poor household was visited by a Field Officer every three months. These Field Officers check the detailed record that the family keeps of their income and expenditures, collect data on the household, and try to connect them to services they lack. For instance, if the family reports that they need help for agricultural production, the Field Officer may record the number of acres, collect data on seed and fertilizer expenditure, and connect them to an income support programme. The Field Officers were in the field for days 1–20 of each month, visiting their assigned households.

Each poor household was also assigned a one-to-one Contact Person to provide continuous support and communication with the household and facilitate its poverty reduction. The Contact Persons are educated civil servants usually working in areas unrelated to poverty reduction. Each has between one and four households

for which they are responsible. These Contact Persons help the households fill out the required paperwork and make sure the interventions are being used effectively. For example, if a household decided to plant fruit trees, the Contact Person could connect them to a government programme that supports the growing of fruit trees. The officials visit the household every three months, offers gifts at festivals, and also regularly connect via telephone calls to provide further support. The telephone number of the Contact Person, and their name, are provided to each poor household.

In addition to these individual-level interventions, the government offered a set of interventions at the community level. This might include a 450,000 RMB special community grant each year for a community-level poverty reduction project. For instance, the village of Xing Long Di received this grant. The village also received a business grant of 500,000 RMB and used it to build a reservoir of water for irrigation. Other community-level initiatives included offering agricultural extension advice



Baby donkey provided to each poor household in Xing Long Di village

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two to three times a year and providing each poor household with a baby donkey. Wu Lang Ji Da Gai village used a similar grant to purchase a combine harvester, which was free to use for poor households (and rented by non-poor households). Because each sector of the government is responsible for contributing to the national poverty reduction priorities, they may offer sector-specific grants, for instance industrial grants that will help industries in poor communities.

An important complement to the individual-level interventions in Inner Mongolia was a plan called *See Daw* or 'Ten Cover Programme'. This was similar to the Village Development Plans (VDPs) in other parts of China. These programmes were designed to reduce poverty within a short time period, in accordance with the local governments' five-year economic development plans.¹⁵ The ten elements provided by the *See Daw* programme consisted of housing, water, electricity, roads, compulsory education, sanitation, culture, broadcast communications, social security and health insurance, and supermarkets. The villages included in this study, for example, all had new roads, new supermarkets, some tree planting, more stable voltage electricity supplies, deeper wells, and other infrastructural improvements. This programme connects many government departments to better coordinate actions to reduce poverty.

3.1.3. Institutional Infrastructure

In the communities visited, many had recently built offices out of which the field officers worked. These offices served as local hubs for poverty reduction programming as well as for other services. Each field office had a help centre for any questions from community members, as well as posters with the names, pictures, and officers' contact numbers. Some offices were also equipped with libraries of relevant books and other materials, as well as large billboards publicly displaying poverty rates, target poverty rates, poverty composition, household composition, community livelihoods, and locally enacted interventions. A few offices had recently installed video conferencing equipment to facilitate meetings between offices to help quickly resolve more complex issues. These resources were intended to encourage participation from local community members and help the Field Officers more directly and rapidly serve the needs of their constituents.

3.2 GUIZHOU PROVINCE CASE STUDY

This section introduces the case study of the targeted poverty alleviation policies in Guizhou Province in south-western China conducted in the region during five days in May 2017. The focus areas were the counties of Meitan and Leishan, where the team carried out 17 household interviews of which 11 were poor and six were not poor according to national standards. In addition, the team undertook three focus group discussions with village teams (in Jinhua, Xihe and Jiele villages) and two focus group interviews with county teams (Meitan and Leishan). A total of 60 people were interviewed.

During the fieldwork in 2017, Guizhou Province was one of the poorest regions of China. With a population of 40 million people, there were 11.5 million who lived below China's official poverty line of RMB 2,300 yuan a year (US\$ 375 a year). A land-locked and mountainous area, Guizhou's poor communities were mainly concentrated in rural areas where agriculture is one of the main sources of livelihood and approximately 40% of the population belongs to various ethnic minorities who are the poorest of the poor (World Bank, 2014).

3.2.1 Signposting: The Poverty Board and the Poverty Poster

The first aspect that stands out when arriving in the villages was the poverty board in the local office. The board contains detailed information about who is poor in the village, household size, the dimensions in which they are poor, and their reasons for falling into poverty and a photo of the head of the household.

There are 968 people within 256 households in this village, and all the people living here belong to the Miao ethnic group. The village team reported that in 2014 there were 69 poor households with 230 individuals. Now, there are 29 households and 81 people who are still poor.

In one of the villages there was also an aerial photograph of the village providing the exact location of the poor households of the village.

All the poor households in every village that are listed on the poverty board also have a poster at the entrance of their house. This provides detailed information about the names of the people in the household, the name of the Contact Person, the department in which the Contact Person works and their phone number, and the duration of the assignment of the Contact Person.



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3.2.2 Identification and Targeting: self, county, village

There are three stages to identifying poor households. The first stage is through self-identification.

Self-identification

As opposed to officials selecting who is and who is not poor, people actively participate in identifying themselves as poor and can apply and register as poor. After officials check that their application is accurate, they are placed on the village registry, and, depending on their deprivations, will start benefiting from government programmes to lift them out of poverty. In addition, a Contact Person will be assigned to the household and will start following up on their progress in getting out of poverty.

Role of County Teams

Meitan County Team

The Meitan LGOP team reported that the identification of poor households in the county began in 2014. Households applied to be identified as poor, and the village team then reviewed these applications and confirmed the poor households.

According to the LGOP officials, about 44% of poor households were poor because of illness. The second most common reason reported by officials for poverty is education, followed by vocational skills, 'mindset',¹⁶ or disability. Before 2014 and 'Accurate Poverty Targeting', officials knew how many poor households there were in the county, but they did not know who they were. They had a poverty map with headcount ratios, but no census-based identification. Officials did not publish the list of names in the village and did not inform poor households about the programmes they could access.

After 2014, the identification of poor households was carried out according to the '5 see' standards. The '5 see' standards refer to the two 'no worries' and three 'guarantees' that were included in the Outlined Poverty Reduction Plan 2010–2020. As explained earlier, this means that households should 'not worry' about food scarcity and clothing, and there is guaranteed education, housing, and basic medical care.

Although income levels are still important, officials reported that the '5 sees' was an improvement on this measure because, as county members of the LGOP also

mentioned, it is difficult to determine income levels, especially in rural areas. This is because sometimes a farming household does not want to say how much they earn, and it is difficult for officers to visibly determine it. They mentioned that some households were not income poor, but they still needed urgent assistance. They were helped to access the programmes that were intended to include them. For example, medical insurance cost 90 RMB per year of which 30 RMB should be paid by the individual and 60 RMB by government. Poor households sometimes needed assistance to know why they needed to pay 30 RMB.

The county level replicated the national structure in that there was an LGOP that coordinated with county-level ministries such as finance, irrigation and agriculture, among others. In Meitan County, there were 58 people who were part of the LGOP. The meetings of this group addressed, among other things, progress on poverty alleviation, follow-ups with Contact Persons, and updates on the databases of poor households (Box 4).

BOX 4. HUMAN RESOURCES ASSIGNED FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN MEITAN COUNTY IN 2014

County: 20 LGOP staff members

15 townships: 3 LGOP staff per township

118 villages: average of 8 people per village management team



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Focus group discussion with Meitan LGOP team

Leishan County Team

Leishan County had 160,000 people and 24,000 poor households in 2017. Compared to other provinces in the middle of China, the population size was small. There were also many minority groups who received particular attention in poverty alleviation programmes. The population of Leishan was 157,000. There are eight towns in Leishan County and 90 poor villages. The county was recognized as poor at the national level in 2014. The total population of poor households was 11,897, which included 40,000 individuals. From 2014 to 2016, poverty reduced to 7,016 households and 24,113 poor individuals, which was a decrease from 33% to 19.8%.

Public officials from the county described three steps in poverty alleviation. The first step was identifying poor people, which was done by a household self-application procedure. After households apply, a public official visits the household to conduct a survey. With this information, the county LGOP organized a meeting to assess applications, check the levels and dimensions of poverty of each applicant, and then published the results.

The second step consisted of identifying interventions for poverty alleviation. The Contact Persons played a key role at this stage, meeting with the LGOP and village management officials to assess and decide which anti-poverty initiatives the household should take part in. The third step was the follow up. Both the Contact Person and the village management officials conducted regular visits to the household to observe and report progress in the interventions to achieve the ‘two no worries and three guarantees’ model.

At a focus group meeting for this fieldwork, representatives from five county bureaus described the following infrastructure:

Women’s Federation: This agency coordinated their work with the LGOP and the bureaus of finance and human resources. One of their main programmes was to provide loans for 300 women who are starting a business. In addition, they were providing training in sewing and embroidery for 260 women.

Education Bureau: This bureau conducted campaigns to inform people about the importance of education. Be-



Focus Group Discussion with the LGOP and Bureaus in Leishan County

yond the nine years of compulsory education, the Education Bureau provided support to 125 students attending university and technical middle school. Their programmes also included a nutrition plan that provided lunch for all students in compulsory education in rural areas. It started in March 2012 and was covering 17,284 students.

Agriculture Bureau: This agency led programmes related to the enterprise policy for poverty alleviation. First, they offered job skills training for agricultural projects. The agency also supported branding for special export-oriented products. Finally, they supported the organization of co-operatives.

Civil Affairs Bureau: For elderly people who do not have any children and cannot work, the government provided two kinds of support. One is to provide a community (nursing) home; the other is to provide help in their own homes. In 2017 there were 60 elderly people living in the nursing home. The government would give each of them 1,750 yuan per year (as part of a universal pension). There were another 393 elderly persons receiving help in their homes. They received 1,050 yuan per person per year from the government. Another subsidy covered

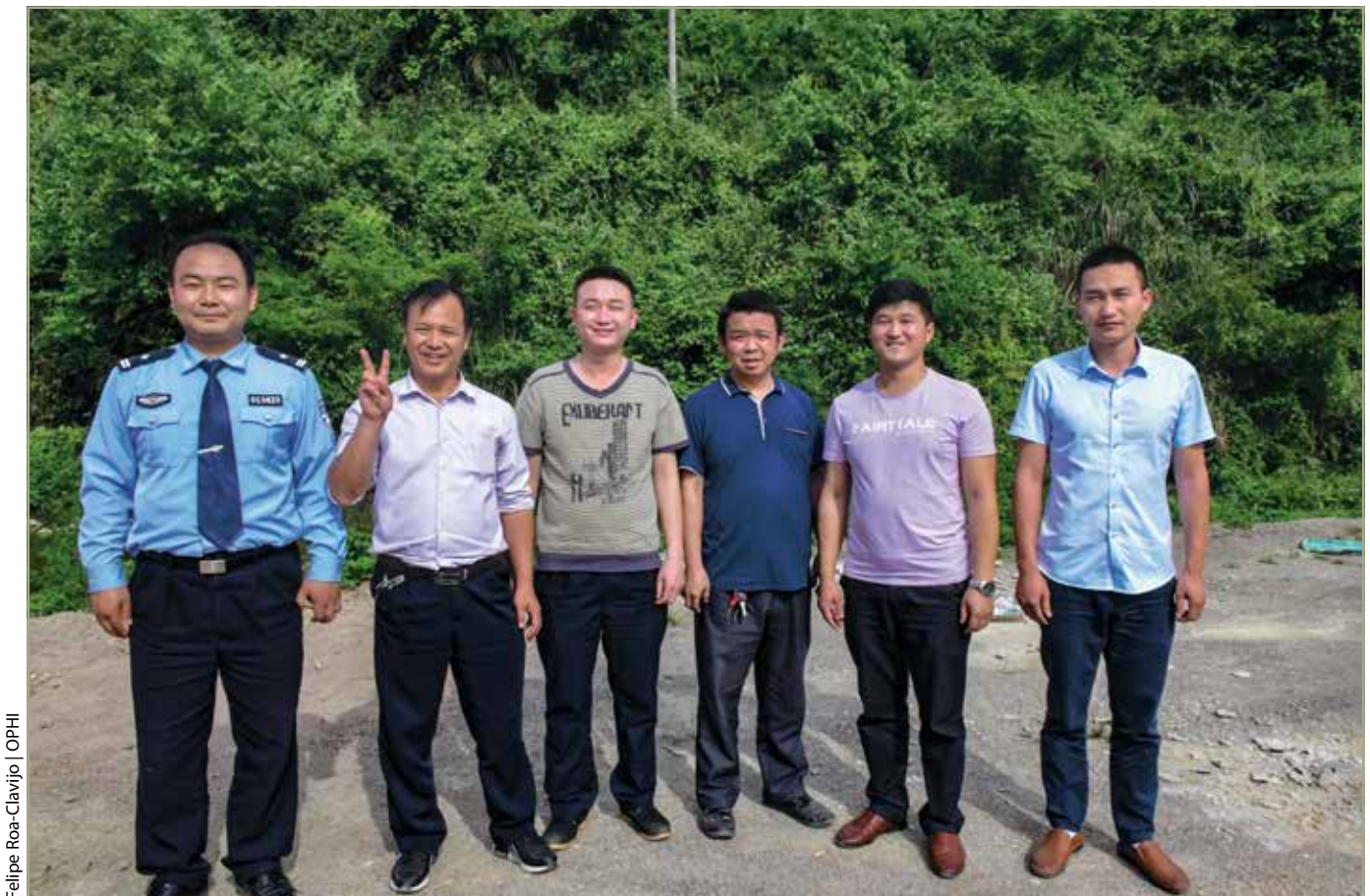
those aged over 80. It has three levels based on age: 80–89 are eligible for 60 yuan per person per month, 90–99 are eligible for 100 yuan per person per month, and over 100 are eligible for 200 yuan per person per month.

Village Management Teams

Jiele Village Management Team, Meitan County

At the village level, there was a management team (with an average of eight people) in charge of guiding and coordinating resources at the local level for poverty alleviation. Most of the visits to poor households came from this team, and they kept track of progress in poverty alleviation interventions. Following the targeting of poor households and the selection of key interventions in 2014, the local team organized the poor village households into 14 groups, according to geographical conditions and connectivity. Then, the team selected two representatives from each group to act as the link between the village and the households.

The team from Jiele village described how the Enterprise Policy focused on tobacco, which is an important crop in the region. The village management officials, in a joint



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Jiele Village Management Team

effort with the LGOP, supported the local cooperative by providing seeds and guaranteeing the produce price. There were also programmes for tea, and the farming of pigs, chicken, and cows. For education, there was a scholarship programme for poor households called ‘Fulfil their Dreams’ that enabled poor students to go to university. Another programme was related to ecological policy and targeted poor households offering employment on reforestation programmes.

Queniao Village Management Team, Leishan County

Queniao village had 194 households and a total of 750 individuals. ‘Accurate Poverty Targeting’ started in 2014 when there were 59 households with 243 poor individuals. In 2015, the number of poor households went down to 44 and 178 individuals. In 2016, there were 135 poor households, and in 2017, it reduced further to 23 poor households with 79 individuals living in poverty.

The poverty interventions included micro-loans, relocation, and enterprise interventions. If a farmer had more capacity, they were invited to join a community cooperative to grow a particular herb or tea. Other markets included

black pig, chili, chicken, or a special deer whose antlers are used for medical purposes. The cooperatives were joined by poor people who contributed land or labour. This form of intervention through cooperatives was particularly important for the reduction of poverty in this village. Other dimensions of poverty were addressed through government projects and resources, such as house improvement, funding for education, and medical insurance.

3.2.3 Individual Experiences in Guizhou

The following case studies recount interviews with individuals in Guizhou in 2017.

Chen Dailiu, Jiele Village, Meitan County

Chen Dailiu is a 64-year-old man. He has been living with a disability, due to his right knee, for over ten years. He lives with his wife, Yang Tunxian, who is the same age. The couple have three daughters who are now all married and have left to live in other towns. They visit Dailiu once a year during Chinese New Year. Dailiu and his wife are living on a mountain slope that is 1000 meters above sea level.



Queniao Village Management Team



Chen Dailiu

The area where he lives is very remote. To reach his family, we drove 20 minutes on a dirt road. He told us that it would take three hours for him to reach the bottom of the mountain on foot. Because of this, most of their neighbours are leaving the area.

Dailiu lives in Jiele village, located in Shilian town, north of Meitan County. Meitan is a nationally recognized poor county and Jiele village is a poor village. Dailiu was recognized as poor in 2013 based on his disability and the couple's age. At that time, the government had not yet built the targeted file system – the only support they received from the government was the monthly *di bao* subsidy.

In 2014, Dailiu successfully applied to be recognized as a targeted poor household, and they were able to receive more support from the government, including *di bao*, industrial support, living standard improvements, health insurance, and infrastructure improvement. With their hard work, by the end of 2016, they no longer lived in poverty. How did this happen? Before 2014, when they became too old to do heavy farm work, they relied on *di bao*, as well as easy farm work to support their daily food expenses. In 2014, when they were targeted as poor, the

government provided more support for them: besides *di bao*, they got a 'menu' from the village office and the LGOP. They could choose to receive technical support for growing tea (before they grew tobacco, but it was very labour-intensive) and technical advice on breeding live-stock (they have five pigs, two cows, and some chickens). The cooperative also hired Dailiu's wife as a farm worker and paid her a daily wage. This enabled them to earn money in ways that their capacity allowed. In addition to this, their living conditions improved as the government built them a new flushing toilet and a road in front of their house. They also received better health care services; besides the New Rural Cooperative Medical System, the government bought commercial health insurance for Dailiu and other poor households.

When Dailiu was interviewed, the team did not manage to see his wife because she was working on a farm growing maize. The interviewers learned from Dailiu that they do not grow maize for economic reasons, instead they consume some and use the rest to feed their pigs. As advised by the village office and the LGOP, most of their land is used for growing tea. Tea needs three years to grow and

2017 was the first harvest year. Their plan was that as long as they could harvest the tea, companies will come and buy the tea, so they did not need to worry about selling it.

In 2017 Dailiu had seven pigs (two more than in 2014), two cows, and an increased number of chickens. By the end of 2016, his disposable per capita income was higher than the official poverty line; they were recognized as non-poor.

In terms of other dimensions of poverty, their achievements vary. Their education level is not high – Dailiu graduated from primary school and his wife was only educated for two years in primary school. They have a TV, fridge, cell phone, and just one month prior to being interviewed they had received a flush toilet. They have tap water and electricity. The neighbours had mostly moved, so they no longer have friends to talk to. Their main entertainment is watching TV. Every day, Dailiu and his wife wake up at 9am and finish their breakfast at 10:30am. Then they go to the field to do some work. At 3pm, they come back for lunch and will return again to do some farm work. At 7pm, daily work is finished, so

they come back to have dinner. Their dining table is just in front of the TV, so they watch TV during and after dinner. At 10pm, they go to bed.

The happiest part of this account is that Dailiu and his wife were able to live a better life, and the guidance and support from anti-poverty programmes have played an extremely important role. Dailiu expressed his thanks to the government for its help – without this, as an old couple with a disability who live on a remote mountain, they could never have attained their current standard of living.

The first time the interviewers tried to ask his deepest hope, he told them he had no idea. When the interviewers left his house, he told them: ‘If there is one hope, I hope you can help to build a road between my house and the main road as it would be easier for me and my wife going to do farm work’.

Liu Xueshi and Liu Liju, Jiele Village, Meitan County

Liu Xueshi is a 68-year-old man who has had a stroke. He lives with his two children on the mountain in Jiele village. His wife passed away five years ago. Most of their



Liu Xueshi and Liu Liju

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neighbours have moved out of the area. His daughter, who is 20 years old, takes care of him. His son is 18 years old and is in his last year of high school, preparing for university. Xueshi and his daughter, Liu Liju were interviewed.

Liu Liju graduated from secondary vocational school with a major in mechanics. She then made the very difficult decision to stay at home to take care of her father and support her younger brother to go for further study.

The household was identified as poor in 2014 and was still recognized as poor at the time of interview. The key reasons were that Xueshi's illness meant he cannot do heavy work; Xueshi's wife passed away, so the family lacks the capacity for adult labour; and two children are in school requiring school fees which pose a huge burden for the family.

Based on these difficulties, the poverty alleviation support included education support for Liju and her brother (Liju had this support from 2014 until 2015 when she graduated from technical high school), the *di bao* subsidy, house re-building (their old house was considered unsuitable for habitation), road construction, and the construction of flushing toilets.

Their main economic resources were the *di bao* subsidy for three people, education support, and income from renting land which puts their income just over the official poverty line. The local government decided to keep supporting them because if they were recognized as non-poor, their subsidies would be cut off and their income would be significantly reduced. The leader of the village told us that usually they will design an expected graduation year for the poor, but for this family an exception was made.

In terms of living standards, they have electricity, a very new house with flush toilet inside (just built by the government a month prior to their interview), piped water, a TV, and a cell phone.

Liju tends to go to bed late at night but wakes up at 6 am and cooks breakfast for her father. She is responsible for cleaning, cooking meals, and farm work on the mountain in the morning and afternoon. Because almost all the farmland has been rented to their relatives, she does not have much farm work to do. They only have a small area of land for growing maize. At night, after dinner, her father goes to sleep and then she has her own time.

When asked about her deepest hope, Liju replied that she wished her brother could go to university. When we

asked about her hope for herself, she did not answer. She later told interviewers that she hopes her father could be healthier.

Yang Zhihua, Queniao Village, Leishan County

Yang Zhihua is a 45-year-old man. He worked as a driver ten years ago, but a car accident left him disabled. Now only his wife works. He and his wife used to make a living by agriculture, but after the accident their life became very hard. They have a son who is 19 years old and a daughter who is 17 years old. The children are both at secondary vocational school. The son is studying electrical engineering and the daughter is studying nursing. The children are at boarding school, but come back during summer and winter vacations.

The family live in the poor village of Queniao. In 2017, there were 29 households and 81 individuals who were poor. In 2014, Zhihua's family was recognized as a targeted poor household based on several criteria: income level, lack of labour capacity in the family, a disabled person in the household, and the burden of supporting two students. As of 2017, his family was still considered poor.

Supported by the anti-poverty programmes, they are now breeding four goats (but they do not know how to sell them), growing crops (maize, rice, tea, potato and a special herb called cordate houttuynia). In addition, they receive *di bao* and a micro-loan, and also rent part of their farmland to a cooperative. In 2010, their house was re-built as part of the unsafe house improvement programme. They also receive education subsidies for their children.

They have a Contact Person who visits them twice a month. The Contact Person stays for one to two hours each time. During their conversation, Zhihua is able to tell the Contact Person his needs, and the Contact Person will try to coordinate with the government to solve Zhihua's problems. During the most recent visit, two weeks ago, they talked about skills training. Next time, Zhihua is going to ask about how to sell his goats.

Every day, Zhihua and his wife wake up at 8am and have breakfast at 9am. After that, his wife will take her lunch with her and walk 30 minutes to work on the farm. Zhihua cannot go with her because of his disability, so he has to take care of himself during the day. Sometimes he sells tea or tobacco. At 6pm, his wife comes back, and they eat dinner together at 7pm. After that, they watch TV and go to bed at 9pm.



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Yang Zhihua

In terms of living standards, they have a TV, refrigerator, electricity, and tap water, but no adequate sanitation facilities. Zhihua wants to find work in the future to earn money because he does not want to stay at home.

Yang Li, Nanmeng Village, Leishan County

Yang Li is a 38-year-old woman. She lives in a predominantly Miao village called Nanmeng in Leishan County. Li lives with her husband, two children, and her mother-in-law. Her husband is four years older than her and her mother-in-law is 84 years old. Their son is seven years old and in Grade 1 of primary school; their daughter is five years old and started kindergarten in July 2017.

Li attended a meeting in the village where the village officers told her about the poor household identification scheme. The family was identified as poor in 2014 because of the young couples' large dependency burden – two children, one elderly person (which used to be two elderly persons until this March). Li described how she had been happy to be identified as poor because as a care giver the government support she received made a significant difference to her life. As of the time of interview in

2017, Li's family was still poor. The local official predicted that by the end of 2017, they were on track to be non-poor regarding their income level, education, healthcare, and housing.

Most of the time, Li and her husband live together during the farm season and carry out farm work together. They have only 3 mu (1/5 hectare) of land because of the mountainous terrain. They contribute half of this to a cooperative and cultivate the rest. They grow maize, sweet potatoes, and vegetables. Part of the harvest is sold through informal channels. Li also has two pigs. Li is the main labourer for the family, doing farm work and taking care of the other members of the family. In the winter, her husband leaves with other villagers to help cut sugarcane in either Guangdong or Hainan. At such times, Li has to take care of the whole family and is therefore unable to go out and work. When interviewed, Li was learning sewing techniques and was the leader of a sewing group which had 30 young members. She had also been trained by outside teachers so she could teach others how to sew.



Yang Li and her mother-in-law

Li accessed poverty alleviation funds, 10,000 RMB and chose to give the money to the tea cooperative as a contribution because of the financial return. In this way, she planned to receive a share by the end of 2017

Li herself finished primary school and her husband started, but did not finish, middle school. The older son was now in primary school in Grade 1, and their daughter was going to kindergarten in July. They had a TV, refrigerator, washing machine, tap water, a phone, electricity, but their sanitation was inadequate. She had chosen not to relocate to Leishan as it was too far away, and the government was building a new house that was a ten-minute walk from the current house, and was visible through the window. Li told us that the new house would have a flush toilet.

In terms of daily life, Li gets up between 6am and 7am. After breakfast, she does some cleaning in the house and then goes to the fields. Sometimes her mother-in-law takes care of the children and other times they go with her to the fields. There are different fields, and they are a 10-to-40-minute walk. Between 11am and 12pm, Li eats lunch and then goes again to the fields. They eat dinner at 7pm and go to bed at 10pm or sometimes later.

When asked about her hope for the future, Li replied she still had young children and a grandmother and that she hoped to generate their own income by taking part in a rural tourist cooperative to earn money from her own home.

Yang Jinquan, Nanmeng Village, Leishan County

Yang Jinquan is a 51-year-old man. He became disabled after losing his hand in 2008 in a workplace accident. He and his wife have three children: a 21-year-old son and two daughters, aged 9 and 20. Jinquan did not finish junior school and his wife did not finish primary school – Jinquan does not know which year she left. Their children were receiving a better education: his older daughter was in her first year of college in Guiyang city and the younger daughter was in 4th Grade at primary school. His son was almost blind, so he was learning how to play a musical instrument in a school for disabled students in Guiyang city. At the time of interview, Jinquan was living with his wife and their younger daughter in Nanmeng Village, Langge Town, Leishan County, under the administration of the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture.



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Yang Jinquan

Jinquan's family was identified as poor in 2014. He applied by himself as part of the first cohort having learned about the application process at a village meeting. The government recognized his family as poor because he and his son were both disabled, the household had to pay school fees and only his wife could do heavy farm work.

Jinquan's family was trying their best to increase their income and improve their living conditions. Jiquan contributed his farmland to the community co-operative and was receiving a share of the benefits. Because of his disability, he contributed all of his 3 mu of tea land to the tea co-operative. He has 1 mu of rice, which he farms himself, as he can do some simple work like rice transplanting. One of the rice fields is near the village and another takes an hour to reach.

Jinquan received a special micro-loan of 50,000 RMB in 2016. Because he does not need to pay the interest, he was directly lending the money to a government-recommended company in return for interest. He was also receiving *di bao* for himself and his disabled son. His house was identified as unsafe and was improved the previous year to fulfil poverty standards. He paid a little money to

join the relocation project, so he was getting a new house in Leishan county. He had only paid 1/10 of the department's construction costs.¹⁷

On account of Jinquan's disability, he could not easily find a good job, but after the relocation, the government helped him find a job in security at the Heishan Hotel, not far from his new house.

He was happy about his new job because it is suitable for him and means he can earn money. Jinquan's wife had joined a sewing co-operative which means she can do some sewing work during her spare time and earn some money. The family members can use the new rural co-operative medical system, and the government also buys commercial health insurance for them for free.

We asked him his hopes for the future. He replied: 'I'm feeling old right now. I want a small bit of land to feed buffalos'.

Liu Wei, Local Party Leader and Tea Cooperative Manager, Queniaio Village, Leishan County

Liu is a public official from the LGOP in Beijing. Two years ago, Liu was placed by the Party in Queniaio village

in Leishan County to support poverty reduction efforts in the village, with a particular focus on the tea cooperative. Liu's work with this village is part of a programme that places public officials from the central level in Beijing in villages across China. The programme has been operating since 2015. The main goals of this programme are, first, to support local efforts towards poverty reduction and, second, to provide opportunities for public officials to experience what it is like to live in a village that is trying to reduce poverty. In 2017, over 35 officers were sent to poor villages in China. Liu obtained his master's degree in the United Kingdom almost fifteen years ago. When he finished his placement in Queniao village, he planned to return to Beijing.

In Queniao village, where households typically have 2 mu of land in separate pieces, the cooperative works by helping farmers gather the separate farmland into a larger total area. The farmland then belongs to the cooperative, and they hire people to cultivate and harvest the tea at 80 RMB a day. This helps the farmers to increase their incomes and streamlines the whole production process. It also helps farmers save time in commuting sometimes long distances to their farmland.

The cooperative sells the tea leaves to the people in Leishan county. After they dry and process the tea leaves, the cooperative also sells it to tourists in Beijing. Liu explained that the 23 poor households in the village are the priority for the cooperative and are called first for labour. If they are unavailable, other people from the village are invited to participate.

Liu established and is the manager of the tea cooperative in Queniao village but, as his placement is finishing, they were looking for a new manager who could take over. He hoped the new manager would be from the village and therefore had started a targeted training process with some people from the village to teach them the main management tasks. The most challenging part of the training was that villagers could not guarantee their attendance because of other household responsibilities and some also had quit. There is also a marketer who is a local villager and had previous experience in this role. He was paid the same income level as the county director and the county branch party director: 2,400 RMB per month.

Liu explained that there are five interventions to help with poverty alleviation in his village. One of them was *di bao*, which is provided to households whose income is less than 3,500 RMB. This is higher than the official poverty

line of 3,150 RMB because Ghuizhou is one of the poorest regions in China. Households could receive *di bao* for as long as it takes for them to come out of poverty. *Di bao* is a last resort intervention because it is not a form of income creation. Therefore, more emphasis is placed on medical care, education, livelihoods, and relocation.

Liu says he deeply enjoyed his time in the village, both in terms of helping poor households and the personal experience of living there.

3.2.4 Contact Person in Practice

In Meitan County in 2017 there were 8,394 Contact Persons, and in Leishan, the number was 885. As part of the fieldwork, both public officials (who are Contact Persons) and poor people (who are in touch with Contact Persons) were asked about their experiences. Below are summarised responses from different groups.

Public Officials' Perspectives in Meitan County

Most of the Contact Persons visit the households after work in their free time. Most travel there in their own car, in a colleague's car, or take public transport. In the focus group discussion, public officials described their responsibilities, challenges, and ways of helping as Contact Persons.

The LGOP Deputy is responsible for ten households. He visits every two weeks to get a general idea of their needs. He makes judgements about what they are lacking and will try to connect them to programmes to which they are entitled.

Agriculture Bureau Representative is responsible for six households. One of these households has four family members and is amongst the poorest in the village. The couple is nearly 80 years old and they have two children – one is 40 and the other is 50. One of the ways in which he has helped them is through an agricultural production partnership. He provides and covers the costs of rice seeds and when the rice is harvested and sold, he and the family split the revenues. By using the messaging application WeChat, he advertises the harvested rice, which helps him to sell it at better prices.

The county's **Deputy Director** said she helped a farmer who was growing too many melons and could not sell them all. When she found out about this, she connected him to the education system, and he found a way to sell them, at market price, through the education bureau, which provides food to schools.

The **Education Bureau Representative** visits their assigned poor households during his work time. Some officials visit together because their households are nearby. They also have contact through WeChat or on the phone. The **Women's Federation** member told us that one of her assigned households grows tea, so she called the agricultural bureau to make sure that her family was included in the bureau's tea projects. She supports another household in a village in which the government only supports tea growing. However, one of her assigned households also wants to embark on a sewing project, so she is helping this family to find training opportunities and projects related to sewing.

Poor People's Perspectives on the Contact Person in Meitan County

Chen Dailiu described how his Contact Person is more like a friend, even someone he will call when he feels that he has health issues. The Contact Person visits Dailiu every week to follow up about his family, his health condition, and his needs and to provide advice to Dailiu. His most frequent question to the Contact Person is about how to breed his pig, because he is still learning about this.

Liu Xueshi and his daughter **Liu Liju** have two Contact Persons. One comes from the education system in order to better take care of the students, and the other one is from the village government. They visited them in the previous month and brought some rice, oil, and food. They also gave them 700 yuan in total. Liju told us that they will come to visit them every three months. In daily life, sometimes they call the Contact Persons to thank them and tell them about their news.

Yang Zhihua is visited by his Contact Person twice a month. The Contact Person will stay one to two hours each time. During their conversation, Zhihua is able to tell the Contact Person his main needs, and the Contact Person tries to coordinate with the government to see if they can solve Zhihua's problem, which in his particular case refers to job skills training.

Yang Li described how the Contact Person visits her and her family once or twice per month. She mentioned how her Contact Person helps her to reflect on her situation and connect with the village management team. Two years previously, she was living in a house with poor conditions, so her Contact Person helped to discuss with the village team her relocation to a different and safer house and she was relocated.

IV. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

The achievements China has made in poverty alleviation have been possible due in part to the clarity of target-setting, funding, policy, management, coordination, monitoring and evaluation.

Clear Target to 'End' Poverty

China set clear poverty targets, timelines and tasks. The practice of transparently identifying poor counties, poor villages, and then poor households, and of establishing clear 'graduation' criteria to become non-poor by 2020, enabled different institutions at different levels of governments to work together to manage the journey of the 'last kilometre' for millions of people.

Evidence-based Strategy is both a Continuation and an Innovation

The evidence-based strategy of targeted poverty alleviation which maintains up-to-date data, enumerates and addresses each deprivation, and confirms its reduction before awarding graduation, has been an intensive and essential component of China's poverty alleviation strategies.

Multi-level, Multi-sectoral Coordination

The scale and coordination of multiple policies addressing focal deprivations across institutions was addressed systematically, and a large force of grass-roots workers were employed to ensure implementation down to the last mile.

Whole-Society Scale of Coordination

This report was unable to cover completely additional types of coordination, including partnerships across geographic regions, with the less poor regions supporting poorer ones, and the encouragement of senior officials to move for one or more years to the poorest regions and of businesses to engage there. Similar to the Contact Person system, such practices activated the recognition that the problem of poverty is and should be a shared concern across Chinese society.

Inspections, Evaluation, and Troubleshooting

To ensure smooth progress, special inspections for poverty alleviation were carried out, so that inevitable challenges in certain contexts could be identified and rectified in a timely manner. The poverty alleviation results of

provinces and other institutions were also strictly assessed according to clear guidance notes.

Poverty reduction at scale

China's example shows that massive efforts to end poverty require finance and labour. The coordination of financial and human resources from national, provincial, county, and village levels involved an incredibly large number of people. This scale of coordination allowed the government to identify household by household, who is poor and which overlapping deprivations they experience so that better interventions to lift them out of poverty could be crafted and implemented successfully. But it also required clear objectives and performance indicators, management incentives and safeguards.

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ENDNOTES

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- 2 Xiao Kang Society or ‘moderately prosperous society’ is a Chinese term, originally of Confucian origin, was used by Deng Xiaoping in 1979 as the goal of Chinese modernization.
- 3 The Chinese Government stated in 2011 that ‘provincial governments take the overall responsibility [of poverty reduction policies] and county governments are responsible for the implementation to ensure that poverty reduction staff go down to the villages and the policies reach every household’ (Information Office of the State Council, 2011).
- 4 The Xinhua Dictionary (《新华字典》) is the modern Chinese dictionary, in which ‘poor (贫)’ is defined as ‘收入少, 生活困难’ and ‘predicament (困, kun)’ is defined as ‘陷在艰难痛苦或无法摆脱的环境中’.
- 5 See the [Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America](#) website.
- 6 China released a new Outline for Development-oriented Poverty Reduction for China's Rural Areas, which it envisioned implementing between 2011 and 2020. See Information Office of the State Council (2011).
- 7 According to the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2015) it was 29.2% in 2011.
- 8 See [Xinhuanet News](#).
- 9 Xi Jinping's speech at the Symposium on decisive battle against poverty. March 6, 2020.
- 10 The State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development.
- 11 In some provinces, it is a programme of the Health and Family Planning Commission.
- 12 Further analysis on China's institutional innovation in policy programmes, particularly of land policy and targeted poverty alleviation can be found on Zhou et al. (2018).
- 13 China Foreigners Guide (2010).
- 14 Golan, Sicular, and Umapathi (2014).
- 15 Piazza et al. (2011).
- 16 ‘Mindset’ relates to a sense of agency over one's situation (Xi, 2014, pp. 7–8).
- 17 To obtain a new house in an urban area, depending on household size, you will need one needs to make a 2,000 RMB direct payment per person. So this household had to pay 10,000 RMB in total; the rest – which is 90% of costs – the government covered. He will then get an apartment of 100 square meters. So the government is paying more than 90,000 RMB; the cost is about 1,000 RMB per square meter.

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