

NGO and Precise Poverty Alleviation in China: A Case Study*

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Abstract: This paper analyzes the market logic and operating model of precise poverty alleviation programs carried out by a native Chinese NGO in China's rural areas based on the case study of the BADICAO activity. Research shows, compared to the government, the NGO demonstrates special advantages at the micro operating level in poverty alleviation programs because of its advanced concepts in sustainable development and its precise targeting to assist poverty-stricken people, as well as its mobilization ability of resources in many ways. While for the special national conditions and the administrative management system of China, the development of NGO is still at an immature stage; independence, legality and the acceptance of citizens are the main factors to restrict the further development of the NGO in acting as the main body in poverty alleviation. Policy support and promotion from the government from a macroscopic aspect are very necessary.

Keywords: NGO, poverty alleviation, "BADICAO" activity

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Introduction

Poverty is a common challenge faced by human society and is also the basic economic problem the governments of all countries try to solve. As a developing country with the highest population in the world, China is now facing the challenges of unbalanced development of its regional economy, the wide gap in urban-rural development, and the rural population making up the majority of the people living in poverty. Since the 1980s, the Chinese government has carried out the Aid-the-Rural-Poor Program in an organized, planned, and large scale way. A series of poverty alleviation programs and related policies and steps have been formulated and implemented and a great deal of achievements have been obtained. The problem of general and extreme poverty under the planned economy system has become the past, the influence of the old factors behind the general poverty of China including the historical accumulation, the old system of organization and the structure of economy have become weaker while the new factors like the income gap and unfair distribution of social wealth, the individual differences of the quality of labor, the lag on reformation of the social security system, natural disasters or man-made calamities and adverse geographical conditions have become the main factors behind poverty. With the widening gap between the rich and the poor, the economic growth could hardly bring tangible benefits to the poor. Our past poverty alleviation model with government playing the leading role achieved limited results. The poverty alleviation programs monopolized or were interfered with by the government, even the integrate program or the special funds program could not provide effective aid to the real poverty-stricken population. (Li Xiaoyun, 2011; An Shuwei, 2012). So, the new task for poverty alleviation in China is how to find and provide aid with limited funds to the most poverty-stricken population out of a hundred million decentralized peasant households.

The practices and research of many countries have proved that if an NGO acts as the microeconomic main body of a poverty alleviation

program, it could function well in “government non-effective” fields and especially in the precise poverty alleviation field, NGO plays an irreplaceable role (Julie Fisher, 1998; Lester M. Salamonn, 1997). Beginning from the 1980’s, many non-governmental organizations have joined the Aid-the-Rural-Poor Programs in China to carry out poverty alleviation programs and activities in poverty- stricken areas. Up to the end of the year of 2010, the number of registered non-governmental organizations in China was 431,000; the research of QingHua University NGO Research Center indicated that around 21% of the activities of Non-government Organizations in China were related to development-oriented poverty relief in rural areas of China, and Mr. He Daofeng’s measurement with investment evaluation method showed that the contribution rate of NGO to poverty alleviation is between 20% to 35%. All the above prove that NGOs will be an important supplement to government poverty alleviation programs (He Daofeng, 2007).

Researchers pay a lot of attention to NGOs which have the international background and such with the Chinese authority capacity. What kind of roles native NGOs play in poverty alleviation is a matter of concern. This article analyzes the market logic and operating model of NGO in precise poverty alleviation programs in rural China based on a case study on a NGO in Sichuan province of China, in which we took 3 years to track the organization's performance to try to find the advantages and the problems of a typical native NGO in poverty alleviation programs in China and to provide some references for poverty alleviation in China.

The “BADICAO” Activity of King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center

Located in Dayi county of Sichuan Province in China, the King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center is a social welfare organization sponsored and registered by Mr. Ren Xuping, nicknamed as “king of rabbit in China” in the year of 2006. The original intention of the

Research Center was to participate in the poverty alleviation programs in the form of an organization to carry out the organized civil social service activities professionally and sustainably instead of in the form of personal activities by Mr. “king of rabbit in China.” For the past 30 years, the purpose of the Research Center was to seek the harmonious development of human beings, economy, society and nature and to actualize the sustainable livelihood of rural families and the sustainable development of rural areas through development-oriented poverty alleviation programs. Referring to the personal experience of Mr. “king of rabbit” and the form of the organization and operation model of HPI, the King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center carried out the “BADICAO” poverty alleviation activity in Sichuan Province in the year of 2007.

“BADICAO” is a plant in Sichuan hilly land with the feature of easy growing and fast spreading. With a little sunlight, water and soil, “BADICAO” will breed in an endless succession and grow fast. The King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center thinks that on one hand the peasant is weak because of a livelihood risk associated with, but on the other hand, the peasant has potential vigor of life. If this vigor of life is aroused and opportunity is provided, the peasant will grow fast like “BADICAO”. The core of “BADICAO” activity is to arouse the potential vigor of life in the peasant. As the initiator, Mr. “king of rabbit” owns Xuping Rabbit Industry Co., Ltd., which is one of the largest and strongest animal husbandry enterprises of Sichuan province of China and Xuping Rabbit Raising Technical School. The “BADICAO” activity initiated to help more rural families enter the rabbit raising industry in a mutual aid model based on the rabbit raising advantage of the organization. The purpose of the activity is to carry out the rabbit raising plan in the villages in the model of mutual aid among the households and villages to create a rabbit raising industry area and to shake off poverty of the villages and finally actualize the common poverty alleviation of the circumjacent areas. The activity is carried out in several stages: establishing the consciousness of self-development of the peasant,

technical training by the experts of the Research Center, passing the hare among the households, sharing the resources, checking the results periodically, organizing the processing and marketing. The Research Center will first choose the supporting object according to the community requirements, the resource feature of the area, the personal willing of the villager and the family population. After the supporting object is chosen, the research center will sign the aid agreement with the supporting object, and then the center will provide 4 groups of healthy hares free of charge (one group includes one buck and four does) to the supporting family. Xuping Rabbit Raising Technical School will provide rabbit raising training to ensure that the supporting family can make money by raising the rabbits. The supporting object shall promise to pass the hare to the next family in the same way during the implementation of the plan, which means the passing of the concept, the technical training, the profit evaluation and encouragement of rabbit raising. When the whole village shakes off poverty, then it will be passed on to the next village. In this way, one by one, the rabbit raising industry will spread out to all the villages like the spreading of “BADICAO” and will finally change the Dayi hilly land into the rabbit raising base and ecological demonstration base. The plan named as “BADICAO” activity is done with the hope that the plan can be carried out with simple conditions like the simple growth conditions of “BADICAO” and could spread out quickly like the growth of “BADICAO”.

“BADICAO” activity began to be carried out in 15 villages and 1518 peasant households in Dayi county, including Sanyuanfang village, Liuping village, Panshi village of Xieyuan town, Yanjin village of Yuelai town, Touyan village of Xinchang town, Zhongba village of Chujiang town, Tuanshan village and Shi’e village of Fenghuang town. In the first year of the plan, the 1500 peasant households of the 15 villages realized the output of 450,000 commercial rabbits and hares with the total income increase of 9 million RMB and above 4000 RMB per household yearly income increase. Now, the “BADICAO” activity has spread out to many cities and counties suitable for animal husbandry in Sichuan province,

like Qionglai, Pengzhou, Liangshan, Yilong, Neijing, etc., and further to Xingjiang province and Inner Mongolia province; the breeding animals expanded from rabbit to cattle, sheep, pig, chicken, duck, etc. From the year of 2006 to present, the total investment of Mr. “King of Rabbit” in this plan is 6.5 million RMB; 74 thousand people get benefit out of the Activity and more than 85% of the families have shaken off poverty.

Analysis of the Operation Model of King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center

During the investigation, we found that the Research Center has the following special advantages in the market operating model compared to the traditional government-oriented poverty alleviation model. There is direct contact with the poor and focusing aid on the real poverty-stricken population. In the selection of the supporting object, the Research Center has a clear and complete description of the supporting object. The Research Center will firstly define the poverty-stricken population according to the standard per capita income and per capita possession of grain of the province; secondly, the Research Center will design a professional village questionnaire and a poverty-stricken peasant household questionnaire under experts’ guidance based on the basic conditions and requirements of the community collected by research and communications with the officers of villages, towns and administrative villages; thirdly, the volunteer team formed by college students will carry out the survey and record and sort out the results to establish effective peasant household information archives, and finally, the Research Center will select the supporting object and publish the result in the village to ensure that the supporting object satisfies the requirement of strong ability of social mobilization and resource integration.

The Research Center introduces more resources into the poverty alleviation program which compensates the inadequate funds in the poverty alleviation program from the government. The resources invested into the poverty alleviation plan include capital, manpower,

knowledge and technology. Regarding the fund resources of the plan, the Research Center successfully combines the poverty alleviation funds from the government, the society and the enterprise together. One percent of the profit of Xuping Rabbit Industry Co.,Ltd. is invested regularly in the poverty alleviation fund of the Research Center every year. The partners of the Research Center include all kinds of organizations domestically and internationally, like The Ford Foundation, The Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Heifer International, The Asia Foundation, The Southern public foundation, The Citigroup Foundation, The Chinese Red Cross Foundation, China Federation of the disabled, etc. Of course, the government poverty alleviation fund is one of the main funds of the Research Center. On the investment of manpower, knowledge and technology, the Research Center has unique advantages compared with the government investment: the free hare and professional technical service of rabbit raising provided by Xuping Rabbit Industry Co.,Ltd.; the free technical guidance and market training by the experts from colleges and universities of Sichuan province; the free services of household research, technical training and education and community construction by thousands of volunteers; and also the knowledge and technology spreading supported by the cooperating professional Breeding Associations.

The increase of the financial support density and the optimization of the resources redistribution is an advantage of the NGO. Compared with the government support, the fund from the Research Center is more concentrated; one program usually only covers several villages and towns. Therefore, to these villages and towns, the investment by the Research Center is big enough, and to some programs, the investment by the Research Center is even larger than the government investment. Now, the government investment to the poverty-stricken area is around 1000 RMB per capita, while the capital support from the Research Center is around 3000 RMB per supporting peasant household besides the investment of intangible assets like knowledge and technology. Furthermore, the social influence of the Research Center promotes the

infrastructure of supporting villages, meaning that the water, road, electricity, bridge and cable facilities of the villages have been improved. By its own resource mobilization mechanism and the programs carried out in the villages, the Research Center realizes resources reallocation to the poor areas and brings opportunities for the development of these areas. The redistribution of social wealth will bring better social equity.

The diversified services to satisfy the requirements of different groups of people are another positive aspect of the organization. The initiator of the Research Center is from a poor family and his experience as a dropout because of poverty gives him a better understanding of poverty in rural China. Because of which, the Research Center is more willing to approach the poor and to satisfy the changing requirements of the grass roots units easily and flexibly. Based on the investigation of the poverty-stricken families and areas, the Research Center will choose the developing program suitable for the area, make out a tailored family developing plan and provide aid to the poverty-stricken families in different ways. For families willing to livestock raise, the Research Center will help them establish a sustainable livelihood by technical training, breeder aid, and marketing information. For families without available labor because of sickness or disability and the children are facing the dropout problem, the Research Center will provide them direct capital support: a certain amount of capital will be provided to the family yearly to support the education of the children. In the mean time, part-timework opportunity will also be provided or introduced during the holiday for the children to gain income to compensate the tuition fee or to increase their income and to establish a sense of independence, which will change the living environment. For the families without livestock breeding conditions because of the lack of natural resources and government supporting policy, the Research Center will provide technical training and job opportunities in the partner enterprises for the youth.

Introducing value orientation, new methods, and ideas into the poverty alleviation program is the next aspect of their work. After the

supporting object is chosen, the Research Center will sign an aid agreement with the supporting object, in which the supporting object will promise to help the next peasant household in the same way. So, the supporting objects will clearly know before the carry out of the Activity that they are developed under the help and support of others and also, they have the obligation and responsibility to help others to develop together. The help includes the passing of the gift (the hare), the passing of the concept and technical training. This method will foster the concept of responsibility and liability and love to promote the ethics in the rural area. Meanwhile, the supporting objects will organize a mutual aid team of 10 to 15 people. The team members will discuss and stipulate their own rules and regulations to protect good faith, agreement and mutual aid, by which the environment of rural area is improved, the spirit of honesty and faith and harmony is developed and expanded and furthermore, the mutual aid team has a stronger negotiation ability to achieve what the individual and single family could not achieve and to strengthen the sense of togetherness and cohesion and competitiveness., Some capable peasants even have the opportunity to show themselves in the mutual aid team to be the leaders of the development of the whole area. The Research Center is now carrying out a five-year plan to train 100 community elitists. The Research Center believes shaking off poverty is only the first step of the poverty alleviation plan, the next step is to “get rich”, and elitists are important to lead the peasant on the road to being rich. In the poverty alleviation plan, the Research Center also focuses on the establishment of the concept of harmonious development of the human being, economy and environment among the peasants. It creatively introduces the “ecological cycle breeding model” combining forest, pellet feed, rabbit and biogas together, which is meant to establish the plant in the forest or orchard, and produce pellet feed for the rabbits with the rank grass or crops straw, and put the droppings and urine of the animal and waste water into bio-gas pools for fermenting to create biogas for living energy, and finally to apply Anaerobic Fermentation Residues (AFR) on the tree and orchard. This “ecological cycle breeding model” is

simple but it effectively reduces the environmental pollution in rural area and promotes the environmental protection concept.

The lack of external environment becomes the important factor to restrict the development of NGOs

During the investigation, we also found that as a typical grass-roots NGO, the operating model of King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center is effective, but there are still some problems with the organization itself and the future development of the Research Center. The biggest problem is the lack of a favorable external environment to promote the further development of NGOs in China presently.

What role a NGO will play in cooperation with the government is the same problem a NGO will constantly face as an enterprise. NGOs should be managed by unified NGO organizations and separated from the direct management of the government. But due to the deficiencies of the socialist economic system of China, the concept of an omnipotent government still exists in local government organizations, the ideal social governance environment of “big society, small government” cannot be achieved in a short time in China.

The government policy is the most important guide to influence the NGO to devote itself to public welfare undertakings. For example, the thriving development of NGOs is in southwest China because of the focus on the poverty alleviation of these areas by the central government. Although the Chinese government has included the participation of NGOs in poverty alleviation programs, until now, non related policies and rules are stipulated to protect the interest of NGOs. Up to now, the Chinese government has published four State Council regulations related to the registration management of Non-governmental organizations: “Interim Provisions for the Administration of Foreign Chamber of Commerce, “Fund Management Regulations, “Regulations on the Registration and Administration of Social Organizations” and “The Regulations on the Administration of Registration of a People-Run

Non-enterprise Unit'. According to the present regulation of Chinese law, a NGO established in China should have a competent business department. The establishment of a NGO shall be firstly subject to the examination and approval of its competent business department and then be subject to the examination, approval, registration and filing of the Civil Administration Organization. Due to the dual management system regulated by the government, NGOs are restricted by both the local civil administration organization and its competent business department. The present competent business department of King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center is Science and Technology Bureau of Dayi county and the administrative unit is the Civil Administration Organization of Dayi county. The dual management by these two departments results in unclear jurisdiction and cross management, which caused the Center to spend a lot of time and effort on harmonizing the work between these two departments. Even so, to some degree, King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center is still lucky and it is at least a legal registered NGO in China. A majority of non-governmental organizations in China could not find their competent business department to obtain legal registration. Meanwhile, "The Interim Regulations on the Administration of Registration of a People-Run Non-enterprise Unit" Article 13 stipulates that the application for establishment of a NGO could not be approved in the administrative area in which a NGO with the same or similar scope of business exists. This stipulation makes the King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center as the sole non-governmental poverty alleviation organization, which brings convenience to the government management and also to the Center, but which also restricts the competition between the non-governmental organizations and forms a special monopoly caused by administrative intervention and obstructs the social resources which can be a part of the poverty alleviation program. That is one of the reasons why the BADICAO program is hard to be promote to other provinces outside of Sichuan province. Other such "Sole" organizations exist in other provinces like the Center and they obtain special administrative

advantages in participating in the poverty alleviation programs of local governments.

Based on the real national conditions of China, the social resources and PR ability controlled by the government is far more than other social organizations. As a grass-roots NGO, under the environment of regulation by dual management system and granted by the “sole” qualification to participate in the government bid to absorb foreign capital and mobilize social strengths in poverty alleviation programs, they have to depend on the government to find the fund and complete the project, while the government itself has its own intention, goal and key points which may be uncoordinated with that of the NGO. Limited by their small scale, the Research Center could not develop large scale public welfare activities, and are limited by the incapability to mobilize the international and domestic capital. Therefore, the Research Center has a hard time promoting its service model and sharing its experience in a wider scope. In the promoting of “BADICAO” Activity, the Center completes this project by cooperating with government and international NGOs with 70% of the operating fund from the government. In the investigation, we found the compromises of independent operating of the Research Center to the government achievements. In order to establish partnership with the government, the Research Center is willing to play the role as a propagandist tool of the government and to attribute their achievements to the government. This endogenous dependency will easily put the NGO in a subordinate position to the government. Once the NGOs are more passive than active in participating in the programs, they will lose their independent consciousness, and the core value of NGO, the independence and non-government, will be greatly violated. The original intention of a NGO to assist the government in poverty alleviation program and to develop the social public welfare undertaking will be violated, and the existing value of NGO will be abated.

The deficiency of a policy environment for the development of NGOs in China also shows in another aspect: the present legal provisions stipulate clear regulations to the establishment of NGO. However, there

are no detailed rules and regulations and implementation standards related to the personnel matters, financial affairs and other matters in the operation of a NGO, and also there are no clear regulations to regulate the authority, inner management and the set up of external supervision institutions of NGO. Due to the nature of public welfare, NGOs enjoy a certain duty-free preferential policy. The “Pilot scheme on improving the urban social security system” published by the State Council in the year of 2000 initially stipulated that the function and the tax deduction and exemption policy to the Charity, the legally registered NGO will enjoy preferential tax policy and also NGOs are allowed to gain but not allowed to allocate the profit. Because of the lack of the detailed rules and regulations to the supervision of the inner management of NGOs, there will be a lot of unavoidable moral risks. Taking the King of Rabbit Poverty Alleviation Research Center as an example, the organizer of the Center owns several profitable businesses that have a close relationship to the Center. How should China regulate the organizer to avoid the misuse of rare resources by NGO under the guise of the name of the Center by the organizer to enjoy the duty-free preferential policies and to achieve the purpose of gaining profit? Although there is no such event happening presently, it will not be guaranteed not happen in the future. The present situation is that, besides the governmental bidding programs, the related department will require the Center to submit regularly their financial data and the use of funds, but on the daily operation, there is no effective supervision to the operation of the Center. Otherwise, the cooperation model in the poverty alleviation programs between the government and the non-governmental organizations is by government bidding. The government established strict restrictive conditions based on the financial strength, the organization scale and the experience of the NGO. Only qualified NGOs can participate in the program, but the government will not follow the specific operation and later development of the program. There are no policies related to the long-term development of a NGO, and the difficult problem of financing is common for all non-governmental organizations. The King of Rabbit

Poverty Alleviation Research Center is just on the starting stage with the main activity scope in Sichuan province and 9 full-time staffs, although the Research Center expends more than one million RMB per year, which is successful among Chinese grass-rooted NGOs, but compared with the international NGO with millions of US dollar resources, it still has long way to go. The main reason for the limitation is still the lack of complete preferential tax system to the organizations and individuals donated to the non-governmental organizations. The Chinese government has tried a series of tax preferential policies, but there are still a lot of problems, such as the giving preferential ratio being too low, donations in kind do not enjoy tax reduction and exemption, the qualified organizations to enjoy tax reduction and exemption are too rare, etc., all of which directly restrict the donation of individuals, medium-sized and small enterprises and community public institutions. The development of NGOs as a whole in China is still on the stage of self-adjustment, self-discipline and self-accumulation.

The lack of understanding about NGOs by common people is another adverse effect of the external environment to the development of NGOs in China. To most Chinese, NGO is still a new term. They do not know its functions and role, and common people have no wide, necessary and thorough recognition about NGOs participating in poverty alleviation programs. Compared with western charity, the Chinese people are not accustomed to seeking assistance from a NGO. In most situations, people will seek formal judicial relief and administrative relief. Secondly, the common people have less recognition of NGOs because to the third department organizations with strong official property, Chinese people will treat them as the second government, and to the grass-roots organizations, people will have suspicion regarding their capacity and will ignore their existence or insist on cautious evaluation. But when the program carries out and people have real contact with a NGO, people will take the assistance from NGO for granted, because NGOs are non-profit organizations and should have the responsibility to solve all of their problems. Some community members

will exaggerate the function of a NGO and will think the programs of NGO are all-around and will help them shake off poverty in a short amount of time. To the volunteers participating in the programs, people will think that religion and philosophy are the support for them to participate in the program and should also be the best awards for them and that no other encouragement is necessary. This way of thinking caused a lot of volunteers to turn passive as time went on, although they were active when they just joined the organizations. The wrong recognition of NGO by the common people put NGO into a dilemma.

Generally speaking, in China, the theoretical research and macro policy on NGOs participating in social administration are behind the practical development. The flaw in the legislation of NGOs creates an unstable and non-standard legal environment for the development of NGOs. In order to improve this situation, firstly, the government should reduce the standard of examination and approval for NGOs to loosen the restriction and to create a friendly and open policy environment to give full play to the superiority of the non-government organizations in poverty alleviation programs, and to gain greater progress and achievements in Anti-poverty career in China. Secondly, China should adopt the beneficial experience of foreign countries by establishing and completing a related legal norm system based on the real development situation of NGOs in China to identify the position, function and organization form of non-government organizations in a legal way and to stipulate clearly the behaviors and activities that the NGO must legally do or obey. Meanwhile, the Chinese government should enlarge the giving preferential ratio and the number of qualified organizations to enjoy the tax reduction and exemption, and should revise and publish reasonable, perfect and feasible tax reduction and exemption policy as soon as possible to enlarge the financing of non-governmental organizations and to create beneficial institutional environment for the non-government organizations to participate in the poverty alleviation programs, which is also the important guarantee to improve the public recognition and trust in NGOs by common people.

Conclusion

The poverty alleviation model of the King of Rabbit Research Center gives us instructive enlightenment. It brings new concepts to poverty alleviation based on its own preference to propose mutual aid. It is more localized, flexible, and suitable than the administration system to carry out effective activities focusing on different areas and groups of people with different level of poverty; its precise poverty alleviation is more practical regarding finding the supporting object and its operation model is more concrete in regards to providing aid to the poverty-stricken population. On the other hand, the problems faced by the Research Center are also ubiquitous in Chinese NGOs. Compared with similar organizations of other countries, Chinese NGOs are still in its primary stage with a short history, insufficient social resources and unfavorable political environment and insufficient capability, which will influence its sustainable development. The establishment of a new service system framework by the government is the key to solve the problem.

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