

Learning from China's Rural Revitalisation

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Beyond doubt, what China has accomplished over the last four decades in terms of poverty alleviation is a miraculous feat, having lifted over 80 million people out of poverty. The next stage is to set to usher in a new era of preventing people from falling back into poverty by maintaining their living standards through a consistent policy and practical measures, particularly for rural population. For the last 19 years, the CPC Central Committee, and the State Council have collaborated on the publication of what is commonly referred to as the "no.1 central document," which outlined opinions, policy tools, and guidelines for promoting comprehensive agriculture development and rural reintegration.

As President Xi stated in the "Two Sessions," "China, with 9 percent of the world's arable land and 6 percent of the world's freshwater resources, has the capacity to feed one-fifth of the world's population." Seven decades ago, the country had 400 million malnourished citizens; today, its 1.4 billion inhabitants eat well and have access to a diverse range of food varieties."

Agricultural and rural development objectives and responsibilities are regularly articulated at the Central Rural Work Conference, with an emphasis on "three rurals" (agriculture, rural regions, and farmers) for the

coming year. In April 2021, Xi declared that food security is a "fundamental component of national security." China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) aims at connecting the two objectives by detailing the country's social and economic objectives. This required the continuation of annual grain production of over 650 million tonnes. In 2021, China's grain output exceeded 683 million tonnes, a 13.4 million-tonne increase over 2020. Remarkably, grain production has increased in the last seven consecutive years. The Central Rural Work Conference set a target of over 650 million tonnes for 2022 to sustain this growth.

On 6 March 2022, during a meeting with relevant representatives, President Xi opined, "the role of science and technology in resolving food insecurities cannot be overlooked." The seed industry makes significant investments in fundamental and applied research, as well as in the collection, preservation, development, and use of genetic resources. I want enterprises to be more innovative in order to help my country's seed sector thrive at a high level".

To ensure food security for 1.4 billion people, stringent policy measures must be taken to address internal and external challenges that could hamper prosperity of the populace, particularly in rural China. Following the Covid-19 disaster and external geopolitical upheavals, a prudent mix of policy and concrete measures will set the stage for rural revitalisation. China can increase domestic food production, control food prices, promote storage and crop integration, optimise markets, prioritise quantity and quality of production, close the supply-demand gap, and strengthen practical measures such as accountability and responsibility in order to achieve inclusive rural development. Additionally, they sought to encourage farmers to grow more crops, establish training centres for agricultural awareness and pilot programmes, promote agri-tourism, maximise plantation, and close the gaps in agriculture and eco-farming.

However, a few additional proposed initiatives would make significant contribution to a robust rural revival. For example, developing high-quality farmland, conserving arable land, implementing scientific farming techniques, including seed quality renovation, industrialising rural areas through "green and blue energy", developing manufacturing sectors, mitigating disease and disaster risks, introducing e-commerce and a digital economy, and adding downstream value to agriculture.

As with every record performance in China, it comes down to three factors: First, consistent policy execution that is frequently reviewed to yield positive results; second, political and administrative intent communicated and transferred from provinces to municipalities; and third, bottom-up engagement of people as drivers of their own development and change.

What, however, is in it for Pakistan to emulate, learn, and implement the Chinese model of all-round prosperity, particularly now that its focus has shifted to rural development? Apart from rapidly eradicating poverty, the Chinese country has now pulled its socks up to ensure the stability and sustainability of rural development. Pakistan's economy has been in disarray for a long time, and the government has made every effort to shore it up. Besides this, the foreign debt repayment and borrowing cycle from the IFIs, with their strangling terms and conditions, is tightening the noose on Pakistan's economy even further.

A few suggested proposals may prove valuable for Pakistan's urban and rural development. First, rural development requires rigorous policymaking; second, rational capital distribution in phases lays the groundwork for achieving the intended outcomes of inclusive development; third, a monitoring and evaluation system ensures timely implementation; and fourth, adhering to the blueprint of Chinese best practices positions Pakistan on the pedestal of development and social security.

Pakistan is also an agrarian economy, with an abundance of canals and rivers, fertile land, and four distinct seasons producing the world's best organic vegetables and fruits. However, scientific means and innovation, value addition to agro-products, inadequate infrastructure, traditional farming practices, untapped "green and blue economies," inappropriate rural development management, deforestation, shortage of equipment and professional training to battle disease and disaster, insufficient public funds, lack of industries, and a paucity of agro awareness and technical training centres are some of the challenges that need to be addressed.

Nonetheless, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) intends to bring prosperity to Pakistan's remote and marginalised communities. This opens the door for taking appropriate steps, including legislative protection, to ensure seamless policy execution regardless of government change. CPEC, often referred to as an "inclusive development" project, possesses all of the essential ingredients to bring Pakistan's long-awaited goal of rural revitalisation to fruition.